

Statements of Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Venizelos following his meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Zlatko Lagumdžija (Sarajevo, 19 February 2014)

E. VENIZELOS: I am here in Sarajevo today, obviously as Greece's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, to convey the historical and firm message of friendship of the Greek people to the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We have very close ties, and my visit is an opportunity to renew and strengthen these ties. My counterpart was in Athens a few days ago to take part in the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative Ministerial Conference, and I am pleased because we have before us the potential to move ahead with many plans – particularly energy plans, mainly having to do with the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP). The TAP extensions into the region must certainly include Bosnia-Herzegovina.

But I am also here, obviously, as this semester's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, to stress and underscore the European stance towards Bosnia-Herzegovina. Our fundamental interest is the stability, territorial integrity and European perspective of this country and, of course, its citizens' prosperity.

The problems are not just inter-ethnic or constitutional. The problems are also economic and social. There are certain fundamental principles of European legal and political culture: democracy, rule of law, human rights, respect for the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights. It is upon these that we build our relations. And I am certain, following the talks I had with my counterpart, that the political personnel of Bosnia-Herzegovina, its constitutional organs, all of its institutional entities understand their responsibility to meet the needs, the initiatives and the priorities of their citizens and safeguard the country's European course, thus safeguarding the country's stability, integrity and perspective.

I am here as a friend. I am not here to make recommendations or exert pressure. I am here to understand the situation as best I can and convey my assessments to my colleagues in the Council of Ministers of the European Union.

The fate and future of this country is in the hands of its citizens. They have the right to a European future with security, with employment, with dignity.

JOURNALIST: What future steps does Bosnia-Herzegovina have to take to come closer to Europe and to keep the road from being long and difficult?

E. VENIZELOS: Following the talks I had with my counterpart, I am certain that the Bosnia-Herzegovina authorities, all of the institutional and constitutional entities of the state, see that the European perspective is the common destiny of the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The European Union – the European family – is a community of principles and values. Here in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the political leadership are aware of the content of the Community acquis. I am certain that they will take all the necessary initiatives to strengthen the country's European course.

Bosnia-Herzegovina needs more Europe, not less.

Complex constitutional situations need to be avoided, and we need to confront the real problems of the real people, but there is a firm foundation. The firm foundation is the common stance that has been set down by the Council of Ministers of the European Union on Bosnia-Herzegovina. I conveyed this here, as the Hellenic Presidency, and I am certain that my collocutors in Bosnia-Herzegovina see very clearly the European framework within which they will move.