

Joint statements of Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Venizelos and Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaci following their meeting (Pristina, 19 February 2014)

H. THACI: (Transcript of English interpreter) As a representative of Greece, but also as a representative of Europe, I wish to thank the Deputy Prime Minister, the Greek state, the Greek citizens for the full support given to Kosovo in this process of democratic transition.

In this process of the Euroatlantic future, I thank the Greek state [...] and for the work they have done in Kosovo. Also, with the presence of experts – Greek experts in EULEX, the OSCE and all international mechanisms.

I informed the Deputy Prime Minister on the progress achieved in Kosovo, on the democratic reforms in politics, economy, legislation; on our European agenda and the visa liberalization process and the Stabilization-Association process – I expressed gratitude for Greek support – and also on the dialogue on the normalization of relations between the state of Kosovo and Serbia; the April 19 Agreement, the steps we are taking to implement that agreement, and on the agreement reached in principle on the functionalization of the justice system in the north. I hope this process will continue in the future as well.

Soon, in Athens, we will open the Liaison Office of Kosovo. So we have better communication, more productive – but also to have many Greek investors in Kosovo. They have had great success here, so we will deepen cooperation between Kosovo and Greece.

Once again, thank you very much, esteemed Deputy Prime Minister.

E. VENIZELOS: Thank you very much for your very friendly reference about our bilateral relations. I am here in my double capacity as the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Greece, but also in my temporary European capacity as the current President of the Council of the European Union.

On the bilateral level, this meeting is an excellent opportunity for both of us to refresh and to endorse our relationship, to go ahead toward our common target: the European and, let me say, the Euroatlantic perspective not only of Kosovo, but of the region of the Western Balkans, our common peninsula, our common historical point of reference.

The Greek economic and financial presence here in Kosovo is very strong and our political willingness is to endorse Greek companies to participate, always actively, in the economic life of Kosovo. Because the reconstruction, the reattachment, of the domestic economy here in Kosovo is something very important for the prosperity of your people, but also for the prosperity and the European perspective of our common region.

Thank you very much also for your specific reference to the Greek participation in KFOR not only here “in situ” in Kosovo, but also in Thessaloniki, because the logistics support is always very important, and also for the Greek participation through experts in the EULEX mission.

On the level of my European mission, my capacity as the representative of the Council, let me state that it is a great opportunity for me, always within the framework of the Conclusions of the Council of last December, to underline our support for stronger ties between the E.U. and Kosovo.

Kosovo has a clear European perspective, in line with the European perspective of the entire Western Balkan region. The strengthening of EU-Kosovo relations and the promotion of the social and economic development of Kosovo are important for the wider Balkan region.

The conclusion of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EU and Kosovo, which will hopefully take place during this year, will be a milestone for the European integration of both Kosovo and the entire region.

And our clear message is that reforms, good neighbourly relations, and strengthening of the rule of law promote stability and the economic development of the region and pave the way to Europe.

So my message is: “Stay on the right track, keep on working for your European and Euroatlantic future, and we will stand by your side”

JOURNALIST: [...] I have only one question: Since the Kosovo government very soon will open the Liaison Office in Greece, and since you already upgrade Kosovo through your [...], does this mean that, in the near future, Greece will recognize Kosovo as an independent state? And do you believe that your decision might have a positive effect on Cyprus, to change their feeling toward Kosovo?

E. VENIZELOS: Let me give a more dynamic, more complete, a more constructive answer. For us the main historical target is the European integration of Kosovo, not only the European but the Euroatlantic integration of Kosovo. This a very important and challenging project, and during the transitional period we have the time to elaborate more on all the necessary steps.

JOURNALIST: [...] Does it mean that Kosovo can integrate in the EU without the official recognition by your country and the other four EU countries?

E. VENIZELOS: According to the so called Copenhagen criteria, the integration of a new country as a member of the European Union is a kind of acceptance of

the so called European acquis. Within the framework of the European acquis, we have the possibility to solve all the problems.

JOURNALIST: Could we insist that you be a little bit more specific on your answers regarding the recognition – eventual recognition – of Kosovo independence? Is there a process ongoing in that direction?

E. VENIZELOS: I understand very well your legitimate and reasonable concern about the recognition, but I am ready to give you more dynamic and more attractive answers. Please take into consideration my answers, and put my answers within a historic landscape and perspective.

Let me underline that on the 21st of January, in Brussels, I had the historic opportunity to chair the first Intergovernmental Conference for the opening of the negotiations between the EU and Serbia. And during this official meeting – and after, during the official press conference – I had the opportunity to underline that this is an excellent opportunity not only for Serbia, but also for Kosovo.

And this is also a great opportunity for me to underline here, now, in Pristina, that this dialogue, the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, is an historic event, and I admire the courage and the determination of the leadership of Kosovo and, of course, of Serbia, because this type of dialogue is something very important not only for this region, but also for the global situation.