

**Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Venizelos' intervention on the Bosnia-Herzegovina progress report at the European Parliament Plenary (Strasbourg, 5 February 2014)**

E. VENIZELOS: Thank you, Mr. President. I, too, welcome the students from Bosnia-Herzegovina, and I wish them good luck and every success in in life, in their careers, and good luck on their nation's course.

Allow me to make the reminder that Greece's current Presidency of the Council is the country's fifth since its accession to the then European Economic Communities, in 1981. Our two previous Presidencies, in 1994 and 2003, were associated major EU enlargement waves. We had the good fortune and honor of seeing the Europe of 12 become the Europe of 15, and the Europe of 15 become the Europe of 25. And the Thessaloniki Agenda, of our previous Presidency, was focused on the European perspective of all the Western Balkan states.

This is always our priority and our strategic pursuit. The fact that Croatia is already a member of the EU, the fact that I had the honor, a few days ago, of chairing the Intergovernmental Conference for the opening of Serbia's accession negotiations with the EU, is very important. Also very important is the fact that we will be re-examining the granting of accession-candidate status to Albania in June, in accordance with the conclusions of the 19 December 2013 European Council, which we drew up at the General Affairs Council of 17 December 2013.

Especially now, with regard to Bosnia-Herzegovina, I must say that I would like to give a very positive assessment today, but, unfortunately, there are problems: problems that must be overcome, problems that are set down in the Commission's Progress Report and the in Council's December 2013 Conclusions. The Council expresses serious concerns regarding the fact that the process of incorporating Bosnia-Herzegovina into the EU has stagnated, and we want to see real political will on the part of the political leadership of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Elections are set to take place in October, and we do not want the election campaign to delay the taking of initiatives that will strengthen this country's European perspective. There is an urgent need for the political leadership of Bosnia-Herzegovina to come to an agreement regarding the implementation of the Sejdic-Finci ruling of the European Court of Human Rights. The entry into force of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement hinges on this.

It is very important to create a mechanism for coordinating on EU issues, so that the country can speak with a single voice on these issues. Unfortunately, the Commission was forced to further postpone the discussion regarding the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) II, due to the absence of this mechanism. It is a shame that the country's institutions and leadership are unable to meet the conditions the EU has set, because this is making us lose time.

It is also very important that we refocus the attention of our friends, of Bosnia-Herzegovina, on matters of rule of law, including judicial reform and the combatting of corruption and organized crime, as well as the handling of the war crimes cases. It is equally important that Bosnia-Herzegovina reform public administration, guarantee freedom of expression, avoid intimidation of journalists, and end discrimination, including that concerning the Roma.

Regarding a more positive development, a number of recommendations issued by

the Commission in the context of the structured dialogue on justice are being implemented – and we thus welcome the smooth completing of the much-anticipated census, and we look forward to the publication of the results. Economic reforms, too, are necessary for the improvement of the business environment. We need to see efforts to make progress in the direction of a functioning market economy and the confronting of unemployment. We also welcome the recent approval of the amendments to the election law.