

Joint statements of Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Venizelos and Italian Foreign Minister Federica Mogherini following their meeting (Rome, 28 February 2014)

F. MOGHERINI: This is first official visit that I received here, in my new capacity as Foreign Affairs Minister of Italy. And this is not by chance, because my good friend Evangelos Venizelos is the Foreign Affairs Minister of Greece, which has the Presidency of the European Union in this semester. And we had the intention of giving a strong sign of making these joint declarations today, to show our willingness to coordinate our work on the Presidency of the European Union.

We share a common agenda on several points. We will also have the chance to talk about that. First of all, to work on a European policy agenda that manages to overcome the austerity-only measures and work more and more on investments, growth, job creation – especially for young people.

And the second priority we share is attention to our neighbourhood, the Mediterranean. First of all, we will be in Rome, together, next week, with other colleagues for a conference on Libya that we will host here in Italy next week, next Thursday. And this is extremely important to us to show commitment on the international level, on the European level, also on the American level, on what is happening in Libya and what is happening in the Mediterranean.

This is not only an issue of concern for the southern European countries, but it is and issue of concern for all of Europe, it has to be an issue of concern for all of Europe and for the global community. And we will work together in this year to make it concrete.

Not only Libya – we discussed the crisis in Syria. The need for common action.

And finally, I can say a few words about another issue we have discussed, which is key in these days and weeks and hours, which is in Ukraine. We have discussed the situation, the latest developments. We have also discussed the joint declaration that the Foreign Ministers of Poland, Germany and France released a couple of hours ago. And we would like to note here, jointly, that we fully support this joint declaration, especially when it takes note of the formation of a transitional government in Ukraine, and especially when it points at the need for this government to face the challenges it has in front of itself in an inclusive way. We remain convinced – says the declaration, and we say – that political stability and reforms in Ukraine require a broad consensus supported by all relevant stakeholders, without exception.

We found these words very relevant, and especially concerning developments of the latest hours in Ukraine, we share the words of our colleagues, saying that we are deeply concerned with the tensions there, and everything must be done to decrease the tension in the eastern region and promote peaceful discussions among relevant parties. We state our support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. We think that we need a European action to try and calm down the situation in Ukraine, and we have a common responsibility in making sure that there is a political dialogue that involves all the relevant partners there, starting from Russia.

I think I will now give the floor to my friend and colleague, and I thank you for your questions afterwards. Thank you.

E. VENIZELOS: This is the first official meeting after the appointment of Minister Mogherini as the new Italian Foreign Minister. I hope it is a very good and positive omen and sign for the future: for the successful and productive presence of Minister Mogherini here.

It is a great opportunity for me to express, now publicly and officially, once again, my best wishes to Ms. Mogherini and also to the new Italian government.

As you can understand, the first point of our meeting was the coordination between our two consecutive presidencies – the Greek one, the first semester, and the Italian one. This year is a Mediterranean year, and we are in a very good position to reaffirm our willingness to share more or less the same agenda; the same European priorities.

First of all, the need for growth, job creation, and also the preservation, the perfection, of the social dimension of the European Union. Because it's our duty to present a new European narrative, especially towards the new European generation.

Europe is not something connected with austerity policies and unemployment, but always something connected with very important and attractive values and also with a very high standard of living.

The second common priority is the strengthening of economic governance on the level of the European Union, but also on the level of the Eurozone. The Banking Union is now the more concrete point on this topic. We are in a position to present some very concrete achievements, because our duty is to finalize the procedure for the acceptance of the intergovernmental agreement on the Single Resolution Mechanism.

The third priority is always the protection of our European borders. As Mediterranean countries, both Greece and Italy are in a position to understand very well the so-called migratory flows, the pressure, especially on the coastal countries. The principle of burden-sharing is something very concrete, and not just rhetoric. And our common willingness is to take all the necessary political initiatives during this semester, and of course during the second semester – the Italian one.

The fourth, horizontal priority is the so-called Integrated Maritime Policy of the European Union. As you understand, this is something very important and vital for job creation and growth both in Greece and Italy. Our common sea, the Mediterranean Sea, is a great opportunity, always open, from fisheries to renewable energy sources, and to the implementation of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. This is something very important in order to create new opportunities, like, for example, our joint initiative for the Ionian-Adriatic macroregion.

Some weeks ago, in Athens, during the last interministerial meeting of the initiative on the Ionian and the Adriatic, the new element was the launching of this very attractive idea for the new macroregion in the Adriatic and Ionian seas.

The other very important field of cooperation is the new pipeline, the Trans Adriatic Pipeline. And our idea is to organize, in Thessaloniki, in the last week of April, a Ministerial Conference with the participation of EU Ministers and also of the Foreign Ministers of the six Western Balkan countries, in order to refresh the Thessaloniki Agenda of 2003, for the enlargement of the European Union, through the Euroatlantic path of the countries of the Balkan peninsula. And during this conference, we have the possibility also to organize a smaller one, especially for the perspectives of this Trans Adriatic Pipeline.

Finally, in the field of open, big global issues, like Ukraine, our position is obviously the same. The problem is now to support an inclusive government, transitional government, in Ukraine. We need a government with a real and tangible capacity to keep public order, to protect the safety and security of Ukrainian society, to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country, to protect all the regional powers and visions and faces of this country. Because the concept of inclusiveness is not only political and social, but also regional and ethnic.

This is also very important for the Greek community in Ukraine. As you know, there is a big Greek community, with more than 100,000 members, and this is something very important for us.

The last statement made by our three colleagues from Germany, Poland and France is a very good starting point. Let me underline once again the last statement made in Kiev this week by High Representative Lady Ashton. The Greek Presidency is ready

to take all the necessary initiatives, according to the European legal and institutional order.

And of course we are in line and in cooperation with the upcoming Italian Presidency on Ukraine as well as Syria. The destruction of chemical weapons is very sensitive issue, and our common interest is to protect, absolutely and without any exceptions, the Mediterranean maritime environment. This is our common global duty.

And on Libya, I express once again my warm thanks for the Italian invitation, and of course I am ready to participate in this international conference, because Libya is a regional and global problem, not only for Italy, but also for Greece, as a neighbouring country, and also as a Mediterranean ally and partner of Italy.

Minister Mogherini, thank you once again for your hospitality, and I repeat once again my best wishes for you, for the government, and especially for the new political leadership of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. All the best.

JOURNALIST: Minister Mogherini, you spoke about the necessity to overcome political and economic. I would like to understand in which way, how it is possible, with which steps, and the same I would like to ask Minister Venizelos.

F. MOGHERINI: What I said is that we will put all our efforts, first of all to make the internal reforms that Italy needs, both on the institutional level and economic level and well. Those of you who follow the Italian politics know much more than when we discussed about that.

Our intention is to use this credibility to propose also during our Presidency, in the second half of the year, in accordance to what the Greek Presidency is doing during these months, not to re-discuss the criteria, the parameters which we have commonly decided over the past years, but to suggest to all the EU that we might need all together to be more flexibility while interpreting these parameters.

We need more investments, we need to pass from an austerity-only policy to an investment one. And in order to do so we have to stick to the parameters, but we have also to fix the flexibility in the interpretation of these parameters. This interpretation is our proposal to the EU and this is, as far as I understand, very much in line with what the Greek Presidency is working on in these months.

E. VENIZELOS: In Greece, after four very difficult years, and thanks to the sacrifices of our people, we are now in position to show globally a very impressive fiscal achievement. A primary surplus after many years of a big primary and also fiscal

deficit. The Greek primary surplus, the best in the EU – maybe globally – is the material and tangible proof of our achievement in the field of the so-called fiscal adjustment.

Now is the appropriate time to focus on the real economy and the possibility to finance new investments, new ideas, and first of all we are now in position, through the distribution of the primary surplus, to support vulnerable social groups, in order to re-establish some difficult measures, the last period of the fiscal adjustment.

But also in the other field, the field of structural changes, Greece is now in a position to show a very impressive cut of our public expenses, especially for the financing of the Greek state and the Greek public sector. As a ratio between expenses and our GDP, the volume of the Greek public sector is between the four or five smallest among European states. This is a big achievement together and in parallel with a totally different labour market, a totally different social security system, and, first of all, with a totally different mentality in the public administration.

Because everybody in Greece needs the state, and not only the European state, in the service of the ordinary people and in the service of growth, job creation and development. But this is our national situation and our national priority, on the level of the Hellenic Presidency of the Council, and absolutely in line with the statement made by the Minister Mogherini.

It is our European duty, our historical European duty, to propose a different, more clever, more flexible, more practical project of the European future. Because three months before the upcoming European elections, it is our duty, for every government, for every country, political party, to re-establish the European dream, the European vision; to talk again about the European values. To talk once again about the Europe of democracy, the Europe of civil rights, the Europe of solidarity, the Europe of the redistribution without sub-phenomena of prolonging nationalism. And also without new, very dangerous movements or trends of Euroscepticism.

Thank you very much.

JOURNALIST (Italian media): The European issue, it is really a good thing to have such a continuity, two states in the Euro-Mediterranean Sea, but I would like to know if there is any sign that this kind of policy could achieve good targets at the end of the year with the position of our partners in Europe. This is the first thing, so, do you have signs that our policy would be successful? And a little second question for our minister, since 40 years Italy doesn't have the Presidency of the European Parliament, do we get there?

F.MOGHERINI: The first question is actually linked to the second one, I guess. I think that if we will manage to deliver something on this line, more growth, more investment, more job creation, especially for young people, or not, will depend very much on our European citizens. Between now and the beginning of the Italian Presidency, there will be European elections. And I would say that it depends on them, that it depends on the voters of Europe to give to the European Parliament one majority or the other. That depends on the new Commission, that depends obviously also on the European Council, but the time when we will be voting for the European Parliament is not just the formal step, it is something that will change, that could change the policies of the European Union.

I am not sure that in Italy these messages have been made clear so far. I hope that in the coming weeks the discussion will move from more internal things to what is at stake with the European elections, really. Because what the voters will vote on at the end of May for the European elections will make the difference on these policies.

So my answer would be, the signs that we have today for sure are positive. Because I could say that the two presidencies of this year, of 2014, are in line with this kind of approach. Someone could say, well, easy, it's two southern countries, I wouldn't say that our countries are southern countries, I would say that our countries are European countries.

I think it is time to stop defining ourselves geographically or by size. It is time to define ourselves as Europeans. Full stop. And here we have two countries, two important countries of the European Union that are saying now we have to move forward. It's not time for a judgment of what has been done in the past, it is time to define together what has to be done in the future. And the impression that I have is that we might have a new awareness in our partners of the necessity of moving forward on the way of growth and investments, especially investments, that we might need more flexibility in understanding how to use the means that we already have.

So I am quite positive, but again the final word is to the people that will go and vote for the European elections at the end of May. The second question, it was about the President of the European Parliament? We'll see.

E. VENIZELOS: Just a very short additional remark. The permanent problem on the level of European policy is always to make the link between the political willingness, the political wording and the necessary practical, material and tangible measures for the real and full implementation of some very important, attractive and social-friendly political statements and declarations.

For this second critical stage we need always the relevant mechanisms. We need financial instruments, we need the necessary funds, we need a less bureaucratic and more political approach from the European Commission and the other European

organization agencies. And of course we need a real European banking system ready to participate in the real economy through investments, through the creation of new job opportunities, especially for the new generation.

JOURNALIST: Taking the latest events into account, how possible is the bleak, the negative scenario of the country's partition? This question is addressed to both ministers. Thank you.

F. MOGHERINI: If I understood, the question is about the division of Ukraine? This is exactly the scenario that we are working to avoid. This will be the worst-case scenario. And this is why we support the joint declaration by our three colleagues to make it stronger, because we believe that, or at least I speak for myself, but having a conversation before on that matter, I think we share this approach. We believe that there is no alternative to inclusive political dialogue on the crisis in Ukraine.

And especially as Europeans, we have to put all our political and diplomatic and institutional efforts to make this road of inclusive political dialogue work in these hours and in the current days. And I can say that from the conversations I have had in the last day and a half, with most of my European, American and Russian colleagues, I can say that I see the awareness of the fact that this is the only possible viable way to follow.

E. VENIZELOS: The European position on Ukraine is very clear. The protection of the territorial integrity and of the sovereignty of the country is our first priority, together with the protection of security and public order for every citizen, and also together with the necessary guaranties of political, social and regional inclusiveness.

A second vital problem for Ukraine is to deal with the current fiscal and financial crises in order to avoid a so-called disorderly default. Because such a default is not only fiscal and financial, but also institutional, democratic, maybe ethnic and national. The European duty, the duty of the global community, in close cooperation with the United States, with the Russian Federation, is to elaborate and to propose and to implement a very concrete and tangible project for the current very dangerous and fragile situation. And from this point of view the current Greek Presidency of the Council of the European Union, in cooperation with the High Representative, is ready to participate in all the necessary deliberations in order to present in the next Council of General Affairs of the European Union something concrete and urgent for the Ukrainian political and financial crisis.

JOURNALIST: I was wondering whether you touched upon the subject of Egypt, since this ministry today issued a warning against travelling to some of the most popular touristic areas in the peninsula of Sinai. I was wondering whether this was part of your discussion.

F. MOGHERINI: We didn't discuss the Egyptian situation in itself. But you are right: we gave this advice to the Italians today, in line with what was decided also by other European countries after having evaluated the situation, actually tonight.

E. VENIZELOS: Even after the appointment of a new government, a new Prime Minister of the new government in Egypt, the main institutional and political priority is to implement the roadmap for the re-establishment of a democratic order in Egypt, through inclusive procedures.

We have a very specific national and cultural concern for some very attractive touristic destinations in Egypt, because, as you know, the famous Byzantine Orthodox monastery of St. Catherine in the peninsula of Sinai is a very important monument of our cultural heritage and legacy. And also the presence of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria in the city of Alexandria is always a big concern for us. But on the political level our position is always the same, in line with the conclusions of the Council of the European Union.