

## **Greek Foreign Policy Objectives and the Greek Presidency of the OSCE**

Summary of the speech given by Professor Constantine A. Stephanou,  
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to the Consular Corps in Greece (4.3.2009)

### **1. Greek foreign policy objectives**

#### ***Promoting peace and security***

Greece has been a founding member and a staunch supporter of the United Nations and international organisations since their inception. Greece has been actively involved in their political and law-making activities, and has always deplored the blocking of Security Council resolutions by permanent members and the politisation of some specialised agencies, which impaired their effectiveness.

Moreover, regional defence pacts such as NATO are, in Greece's view, an essential element of collective security. From 1952, when Greece became a member of NATO, until 1974, the main threats to Greece's security were deemed to originate from the Warsaw Pact. Following the invasion and occupation of Northern Cyprus by Turkey, Greece left the military structure of NATO for a brief period of time (1974-89). The historical changes of 1989 and NATO's new role at the service of the United Nations have induced Greece to provide facilities for NATO's operations in the Balkans, as well as substantial military contingents for peace-keeping operations.

#### ***Promoting European Political Unification***

Greek public opinion has consistently been pro-European. In the *Eurobarometer* polls, the deepening and widening of the European Union receive overwhelming support. Moreover, the leaders of the two major political parties, New Democracy and PASOK, have been staunch supporters of Greece's participation in the eurozone and have frequently referred to the federal future of the European Union. Until, however, such a state is reached, Greece is strongly attached to the principle of equal footing in EU institutions and supports a strong role for the so-called supranational institutions, namely the European Commission and the European Parliament.

Although Greece has been among the first member states to ratify the Lisbon Treaty, it has given sympathetic consideration to the Irish demand seeking to maintain the current composition of the Commission, i.e. one Commissioner per member state.

On the other hand, Greece is likely to support any measure enhancing the diplomatic capability of the Union, as long as this does not lead to the formation of a *directoire* of the larger member states. Europe should speak with one voice not only on trade and economic affairs but on security as well. Following the Treaty amendments at Maastricht and Amsterdam extending the scope of the European Union to the so-called Petersberg military tasks, Greece has actively contributed to efforts aimed at building a European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) and to establish a 60.000 men European Rapid Reaction Force. Greece pledged to contribute a 3.500 men contingent, to be composed of professional military. Moreover, Greece is able and willing to participate in the structured cooperation in defence provided in the Protocol attached to the Lisbon Treaty.

### ***Preserving the US-Greek strategic partnership***

US-Greek relations have been based on the common commitment of the two countries to freedom and democracy. US assistance was of critical importance for the economic recovery of Greece in the 1950's. Nevertheless, Greek public opinion has held the United States responsible for interference in Greek politics during the same period and for supporting the military dictatorship that ruled Greece from 1967 to 1974. More recently, however, it has been the United States rather than Greece that have complained about the conduct of its partner. The United States have been critical of Greek disarmament initiatives during the last period of the Cold War and of Greek attitudes towards liberation movements, deemed by the United States to be terrorist movements. Nevertheless, Greek governments have invariably supported US involvement in the security of Southeastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean, because of the permanent threat of instability in the region. In Greece's view, the United States are capable of containing crises by projecting military power in the area, although in Greece's opinion, intervention should always be compatible with the provisions of the UN Charter. Moreover, cooperation with Russia and China is essential for the smooth functioning of the United Nations.

In Greece's view, security and stability in the Mediterranean, Balkan and Black Sea areas are interrelated. The self-restraint of governments in the pursuit of national

interests, although an important factor, cannot by itself achieve the said goals. Long-term security and stability depend on the economic development of the aforementioned areas, as well as cultural interchange between the peoples involved. Moreover, the anchoring of the European periphery into the Euro-atlantic institutions remains a top priority of Greek foreign policy.

## **2. The changing international environment and its implications on the OSCE**

Prior to any evaluation of the challenges and opportunities facing the Greek presidency of the OSCE, one should take into account the trends and constraints of the international environment. It seems that the new US President will distance himself significantly from his predecessor and try to make good use of international organizations. Notwithstanding the current economic crisis, security is likely to remain a priority area in the international agenda. Under these circumstances the OSCE may still become more relevant, although it is not involved in one major security threat, namely the proliferation of nuclear arms. Moreover, unlike the European Union, the OSCE is a traditional international organization where decisions are reached by consensus of its members (56 states). Although entrusted with important functions, its capability to act depends on what the member states allow it to do and - essentially - the USA, Russia and the 27 members of the European Union coordinated by the respective presidency.

The OSCE has served as a bridge between the Soviet Union and the West. At present it may serve as a bridge between Russia and the West following the deterioration of their relations resulting from the Georgian crisis of last summer. The new US administration and its Russian counterpart have already embarked in efforts to improve their mutual relations, which is likely to affect the capability to act of the OSCE. Nevertheless, the USA and the Europeans are not yet ready to discuss a new European security pact, to which Russia has alluded to. Their attitude towards Russia may change if this country becomes more cooperative in dealing with Iran's nuclear program and the war in Afghanistan; Iran itself may actually be solicited to provide support to the Western alliance embattled in Afghanistan. All in all, improvements in bilateral relations between the USA and Russia are likely to facilitate the action of international organizations such as the UN and the OSCE.

It is worth taking a closer look at OSCE peace-keeping operations and - more specifically at the OSCE mandate in S. Ossetia. The mandate has expired at the end of last year due to Russian conditions laid down for its renewal; a new mandate aimed at bringing back observers has recently been submitted to the parties by the Greek presidency but - until now - has been approved only by Russia. The USA has refrained from endorsing the plan.

A final question is about the possible impact of the current economic crisis. The OSCE is a political organization and is not involved in policies aimed at containing the crisis. Nevertheless, its role may be affected by the crisis. Concern about the economy now exceeds - by far - interest in security matters. Moreover, human rights and minority protection are likely to be relegated to a secondary status, as demonstrated during the visit of the US Secretary of State to China. On the other hand, concern about the economy focuses on ways to overcome the current crisis, rather than sustainable development and its environmental dimension. Nevertheless, these topics have gradually been included in the agenda of the OSCE and the Greek presidency is planning to organize workshops and conferences on the current challenges.

To sum up, the new international environment allows universal as well as regional organizations to play a bigger role in international affairs. In the case of the OSCE, the improvement of US-Russian relations is likely to affect the capability to act of the organization and to provide new opportunities to its Greek presidency.