

American - Hellenic Chamber of Commerce
(AmChamGR Digital Talks and Events)

Ψηφιακή συζήτηση με θέμα «Ο γεωπολιτικός ρόλος της Ελλάδας ως παράγοντας σταθερότητας και πολύτιμος σύμμαχος στην περιοχή της Ανατολικής Μεσογείου»

(Αθήνα, 16 Ιουλ 20)

Ladies and Gentlemen good afternoon,

- Allow me first to express my sincere gratitude to the American - Hellenic Chamber of Commerce for this kind invitation to participate in this important and timely digital event in the context of this series of digital discussions.
- I am delighted to be given the opportunity to communicate with you today; sharing my thoughts with your audience, on the geopolitical role of Greece, as a pillar of stability to the emerging security challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean, combined with the strategic cooperation with the U.S.
- Today, **Eastern Mediterranean** is once again the epicenter of a **wide spectrum of security challenges** and **risks**. The failure to cope with these challenges would definitely have a negative impact on the stability of the region, while the consequences may spread in the immediate neighborhood and beyond.
- The **Eastern Mediterranean security environment today** is characterized by at least three interconnected dynamics: the recent hydrocarbons discoveries off the coasts of Israel, Cyprus and Egypt, the geopolitical competitions - imbalances of power, and the increased interest in the area from external powers.

First: The new gas deposits findings in the region have been among the main drivers of the geopolitical environment changes. The Energy Security which constitutes a quite challenging field and the recent discovery of significant oil and gas deposits, with prospects for

significant additional findings has driven many regional actors to raise competing territorial claims for these valuable resources.

In **Syria's civil war** outside actors, such as Russia, Iran and Turkey increasingly intervene in Syrian affairs, further igniting the civil war and raising concerns over an unintended escalation. Ongoing violence and proxy conflicts are also facilitating the resurgence of terrorist groups, increase regional instability, undermine the inclusiveness of the potential political settlement, deepen the humanitarian crisis and increase the **migratory flows**.

Turkey is further escalating tension in our region. Except for its intervention in Syria, Ankara has been significantly involved in **Libya**, by providing substantial support with personnel and armaments to one of the two conflicting parties, and managed to convince the GNA to sign the two illegal MoUs. The first MoU that maps out a sea boundary between the two countries, southeast of the island of Crete, violates the international law and our sovereign rights in the Greek maritime zones. The second MoU on security and military cooperation, works in practice against the UN arms embargo in Libya. Turkey intervenes in Libya's affairs, directly meddling with the reconciliation process, thus seriously undermining efforts towards a political solution to the Libyan issue. The Turkish decision to deploy troops and assets in Libya presents a dangerous threat to regional stability. On the contrary, the EU operation "IRINI", in which Greece substantially participates, contributes to the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions.

- I would like to stress the fact that, the primary driver of changes and threats in our region has been **Turkey's aggressive and authoritarian strategic posture** which aims to consolidate its presence and its claims in the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey remains the main **destabilizing factor in the region**. Except for its involvement in Syria and Libya, I would like to underline the following:

- Ankara's offending attitude in the Aegean continues unabated with an escalation in **violations of Greek Territorial Waters, National Airspace** and even **over – flights of Greek inhabited islands**.

- It continues to dispute international legality by launching hydrocarbon exploration drilling operations within the **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and Territorial Waters of the Republic of Cyprus**, including the Blocks where international companies have obtained licenses.

- Ankara systematically questions the right of Cyprus to delimit its exclusive EEZ and exploit any their valuable natural resources there. We welcome the fact that the U.S, the EU and the International community have come out firmly in favor of Cyprus' sovereign rights for Hydrocarbon exploitation in its EEZ.

- The latest Turkish provocation in our region is even more confrontational than in previous instances. Ankara this time has issued hydrocarbon **exploration licenses** in maritime regions which include continental shelf of Greek islands, arguing that the islands do not have a continental shelf, only territorial waters that reach 6 nautical miles". Greece has rejected these illegal claims, because according to the International Law of the Sea, **islands – regardless of their size – have full entitlement to maritime zones** as other land territories do.

• Our position to all these provocative actions of Turkey is clear and our red lines have been set. We are determined to continue to exercise our full **sovereign rights** stemming from **international treaties** and **international law** and, in no case, we would spare the necessary measures and actions to defend our sovereignty. As Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis recently stressed *"...Greece will face all challenges with consistency, stability, confidence and always with a commitment to international law, as it always does."*

• It is important to note, through, that **Turkish actions threaten also the U.S interests**. First of all, by providing the opportunity to Russia to deepen its military footprint and posing new threats to the U.S allies in the region. Moreover there is high risk or high probability that mercenaries and militants dispatched by Turkey to Libya could include former leaders of jihadist groups and create new cells of terrorism.

• In this region, Greece, as a member of the EU and NATO, increasingly stands out as the most stable, credible and in fact indispensable partner and Ally for the other EU member states, the U.S. and the West in general. Against this volatile situation, Greece promotes **Defence Diplomacy** and fruitful regional cooperation on the basis of international law, extant treaties and legitimacy with all our

neighboring countries acting at the same time as a conduit among countries in the East Med and the Gulf.

- Through a **nexus of multilateral schemes of defense cooperation** that we have established together with Cyprus, we are actively encouraging **important synergies and practical cooperation** with Israel, Egypt, Jordan and as of late, the UAE; initiatives not directed against other states in the region. This type of cooperation is strengthening the defense ties among the countries in the region and is mainly expressed through regularly organized bilateral and multinational military exercises and meetings at Defense Ministerial level. Lately we conducted a 4 parties Search and Rescue exercise south of Cyprus, with the participation of Greek, French, Italian and Cypriot assets and personnel.

- These exercises are promoting interoperability between the regional actors, while extending a sense of security and stability in the entire area. The multilateral cooperation schemes are supported by solid political will and are excellent platforms to promote common interests, while highlighting the critical role of Greece as a pillar of stability and as a security provider in the region. Prominent among those is, of course, our cooperation with Israel and Cyprus, especially with the participation of the **United States an Ally with specific weight to peace and stability in Eastern Mediterranean.**

- In the bilateral level, the **U.S - Greek unwavering and strategic relationship** is the result of the traditionally excellent relations of our people who share common values and principles of freedom, democracy, human rights and respect for International Law. This is a proof of the strong bond that links both countries, a bond which officially dates back two and more centuries and today is stronger than ever. It is also a necessity as a result of the geopolitical developments in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East and our common resolve to work together to promote peace, stability, cooperation and prosperity in the region.

- The development that highlights in the most evident way that our bilateral relations are at their highest point is the establishment of the **Strategic Dialogue** and the amendment of the Defence Cooperation Agreement (**MDCA**), signed on October 5th 2019. The Strategic Dialogue is providing us with the opportunity to plan our cooperation in detail and also in depth, in a number of important fields of defence

activities such as, defence and security, counter-terrorism, people-to-people contacts, energy but also trade and investment.

- Other actions that promote the strategic bilateral defense cooperation is the continuation of the Hellenic and U.S Armed Forces exercising and training, thus further increasing their levels of interoperability, combat readiness, and combat effectiveness. This engagement also complements **Greece's** efforts to become a **mentor and regional training hub for Allies and partners in the Balkan, Black Sea, and the East Mediterranean.**
- In addition, the amended MDCA will allow significant U.S investment in critical infrastructure upgrades that will support its operating forces, which in turn will enhance and expand the military presence of U.S personnel and assets in different locations in Greece, such as Larissa and Stefanovikeio air bases in central Greece, the Alexandroupoli port, and help the sustainment of increased naval activities through the U.S Naval Support Activity in Souda Bay Crete.
- Undoubtedly now, the upgraded MDCA, which was one of the first decisions and top priorities of Prime Minister's Kyriakos Mitsotakis Government, offers much more flexibility and opportunities to deepen our cooperation on the defence and defence - technical domain. It is a tool which enhances the U.S.-Greece defense relationship to address the "challenges of tomorrow" and clearly reflects our will for further deepening and expansion of our cooperation, benefiting both nations and also, sends a message to any countries in the region whose actions are in violation of international law.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Greece and U.S, as NATO member states, share the same vision, the same values and political perspectives for the prosperity and stability in the wider area. The security situation in our wider area demands increased awareness, strengthened deterrence and defense capabilities that are adapted to the new threats.
- The U.S. has significant national security interests and concerns in the Eastern Mediterranean and therefore, needs **reliable allies** and should look primarily to those who share the same interests and

values. Greece is a credible ally, with capable Armed Forces, who respects its obligations, honors its commitments and is dedicated to promoting stability and security in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans and beyond standing ready to resume its proper regional role.

- Thank you again for this kind invitation and I congratulate you on your excellent work in hosting this digital event.