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The President's news conference with Prime Minister Konstandinos Simitis of Greece in Athens

William J Clinton; Konstandinos Simitis

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Prime Minister Simitis. Ladies and gentlemen, with very special pleasure, the Greek Government and the Greek people and I, personally, are welcoming President Clinton and the American delegation. This visit is confirming the historic friendship relations between the two countries and between our two people, a relationship that has been kept alive by the Greeks who have lived and are still living creatively in the United States, by the common struggles in other times, by our close relationship and partnership within the North Atlantic Alliance, political solidarity, and cooperation, our cooperation for our common goals.

With President Clinton, we had a very friendly, open, and free discussion. During our talks we covered all issues, those which under the present situation have a certain importance from our country, for going from Greek-American relations to developments in the Balkans, Greek-Turkish relations, and the Cyprus issue. We agreed, as regards Greek-American relations, that there is still considerable margin for the improvement of the cooperation between the two countries.

Greece, thanks to its economic renewal these last few years, provides new major opportunities for investments, trade relations, relations in the field of technology, and other areas. For the Balkans, our conviction is that the present situation entails certain risks. Stability is necessary in the region, respect of existing borders, and the strengthening of initiatives for the reconstruction of the region, and above all, the implementation of the Stability Pact.

As regards relations with neighboring Turkey, we have emphasized the need of deserving international law and international treaties and conventions. Rapprochement, steps towards rapprochement have been made recently. We believe that the most substantial answer is required on the part of Turkey to the initiatives of the Greek side.

We have agreed that Turkey's European perspective will help establish closer links based on peaceful development and cooperation. However, its candidature could not be accepted unless certain conditions are met for the settlement of existing problems. As regards the Cyprus issue, we have agreed that talks that have

just started should be substantive in order to lead to the settlement of this issue.

The talks with the United States political leadership are, of course, self understood. We have had a very interesting exchange of views, as I said, on all important issues for us. And we have also ascertained the friendly relations between the American and the Greek people, the close ties, not only at a political and economic levels but also at the levels of styles and culture where we believe our relations and cooperation should be extended. The friendship between our two peoples is confirmed by the substantial presence and role of a Greek community in the United States; successfully, it is making full use of all its rights as an American citizen.

Greece is a pole of democracy, political stability, social and political cohesion in the wider region. Its potential is much greater compared to the size of the country and its population. We have established that it is in the interest of both countries for our cooperation to safeguard and promote peace development and a network of relations in the region that would minimize tension, and this is why we will pursue and strengthen our cooperation with the United States.

This visit does not just confirm the past but also constitutes a guarantee for the future where, together, we can respond to the new challenges, the new challenges of a new era, of a new reality that is taking shape at the end of this century based on mutual understanding, equal cooperation, common resolve, and determination to face problems together, provide new answers, build on the values of democracy, freedom shared by our people, which are defended by our people, the values that we want to promote.

President Clinton. First of all, Prime Minister, let me thank you and the members of your government for the very good meeting that we had today. I think the Prime Minister has summarized the results of our meeting quite well. I would like to add just a few words.

First, the Greek relationship is profoundly important to me and to the United States because of the values and history we share; because of the large role Greek-Americans play in our national life, as the Prime Minister said. But also because of two historic transformations that have occurred in the last decade.

The first is the transformation of southeast Europe from a battleground between East and West to a prodding ground for democracy and tolerance in the post-cold-war world. The second is the remarkable transformation of Greece itself into a regional leader with a booming economy, a vibrant democracy, with the ability to help to pull its neighbors together and push them forward into 21stcentury Europe.

We spoke a lot today about the role Greece is playing in the Balkans, with its troops in Bosnia and Kosovo, with its support for economic development and reconstruction, with its private sector investment. Greece is carrying a heavier burden in this region than almost any other country, but the potential payoff is very large: an undivided, democratic Europe, in which wars like those we've seen in the former Yugoslavia no longer happen. And I want to pay a tribute to the Prime Minister and the people of Greece for all they are doing in the Balkans and pledge my support for the Stability Pact and the economic growth necessary for this to work.

Of course, we also spoke about the road to reconciliation and lasting peace between Greece and Turkey and the issues in the Aegean and, of course, Cyprus. I told the Prime Minister how pleased I am that the parties in Cyprus have agreed to start these proximity talks on December 3d in New York, and how determined I am that they be serious talks. The goal is to lay the foundation for meaningful negotiations toward a comprehensive settlement. We should have no illusions; there's a tough road ahead. But we will work closely with Secretary-General Annan to ensure that the talks are productive.

We talked about our growing trade and investment, about how we can strengthen our economic relationship further. Greece's economic renewal has made it one of the most attractive places in Europe in which to do business. I am very pleased that its progress in improving protection for intellectual property rights makes it possible to move rapidly toward settling our copyright case in the WTO.

Finally, let me just express the great sympathy and support of the American people to all those who lost their loved ones in the tragic earthquake last August. We will not forget the heroism of the Greek emergency teams who pulled survivors from the rubble, not only here in Athens but also across the Aegean in Turkey. I am very glad that our own Federal Emergency Management Agency has agreed with its Greek counterparts to work together to strengthen their preparedness for future disasters.

Let me say in closing, I am satisfied with the work we advanced today. We look to, as I said last night, we look to ancient Greece for inspiration but to modern Greece for leadership and for partnership. After this visit, I believe we have strengthened that partnership.

Thank you very much.

Turkey's Candidacy for European Union Membership

Q. From what we know, you did ask while you were in Turkey for some

specific move by Ankara that would match the moves Greece has done in order, also, to make her candidacy for the European Union easier. Do you have anything concrete on that?

President Clinton. Well, I didn't think that was my role. Let me tell you what I did do. I spoke both at every opportunity, publicly and privately, before the Turkish Assembly, before the business group, before the group of earthquake survivors, and in all my private meetings about the importance of resolving outstanding issues between Greece and Turkey, including Cyprus.

I specifically asked that the Halki seminary be reopened. I have pushed a lot of issues. And I came away believing that in the next few months, as all these issues are bubbling up-the start of the proximity talks, the debate over whether Turkey should be given candidacy status in the EU at Helsinki, and the continuing bilateral talks between Greece and Turkey-which I applaud the Prime Minister's government for his leadership in-that there will be an opportunity to resolve a large number of these issues.

I hope that my trip there was constructive in that regard. I believe it was. But I would not expect the Turkish leaders to let me be the conduit of their ultimate resolution of this. I think that I helped to improve the climate, and I dealt with a lot of the specific issues, and I feel good about that.

Prime Minister Simitis. Let me add two words for my part. During the meeting ahead with Mr. Ecevit and during Mr. Papandreou's meeting with Mr. Cem, we emphasized the need of certain movements and initiatives on the part of Turkey. And I believe that President Clinton's visit was important because he referred to that question, and it has helped, as well as the talks we had with the Turkish side on increasing awareness on the part of Turkey that things are not that easy. We cannot just expect for something to happen without doing or contributing anything for our part. You help yourself, and God will help you, as we say. We have to do something for our part, as well.

Greek Protests of President's Visit

Q. Sir, the demonstrations last night ineluded extensive arson and damage. I want to know if you're concerned by the protests, and what you say to the Greeks who oppose your visit here?

President Clinton. What was the last part of your question?

Q. What's your message to the Greeks who are protesting, who oppose your visit here? President Clinton. Well, first of all, I think that we have to-especially in Greece-reaffirm the right of people to

protest in a democracy. Secondly, I strongly believe the protests should be peaceful, and therefore, I deeply regret the Greeks who had their property injured and who suffered losses through these demonstrations.

But I think that the important thing is that we reaffirm the value of the relationship between our two countries. I think that--I know most Americans deeply value the relationship with Greece, notwithstanding the fact that almost all of the people of Greece disagree with our policy in Kosovo and, beore that, in Bosnia. I believe I did the right thing, and I think most Americans believe that we did the right thing to stand against ethnic cleansing.

But that doesn't affect our affection for and our support for the people of Greece and the Government of Greece. And I would hope that most Greek citizens would, like the Greek Government, believe that there is value in our relationship and our partnership; and that even if we have a disagreement, we can't allow that to undermine our relationship or our partnership.

I would just say, looking toward the future, I, personally, admire very much and support very strongly the leadership that Greece is exercising in the U.N. operations in Bosnia and in Kosovo and generally in the Balkans and throughout southeastern Europe. And I believe that if we can, the rest of us, do our part to help the economy grow there and provide a magnet that enables these nations to pull together, that Greece will lead them into a very different future in the new century.

Prime Minister Simitis. May I also point--Greece is a country, a democratic country where everyone can freely express his views and opinions. But as we had emphasized before President Clinton's arrival, our Constitution provides that these expressions of opinions and views should be made in a peaceful way and within the context of legality. And I'm sorry for the fact that certain people did not observe and respect this fundamental principle of law, the fundamental principle that allows our states to operate and function.

The friendship, however, between the two people and the partnership, our partnership with the United States, will not be determined by these protests, but by our common goals, our common objectives and pursuits, our efforts to handle and face problems together. And the meeting today has shown that we share common goals and common pursuits, and we're trying together. This is the foundationof a friendship.

Turkey's Candidacy for European Union Membership

Q. Mr. President, I followed your trip in Ankara, and you seemed to

be mostly the strongest supporter of Turkey's candidacy in the European Union. So do you think that the permanent conditionality of Turkey's candidacy should be, first, the solution of the Cyprus problem and, second, the acceptance of the jurisdiction of Turkey, as far as the Court of Hague is concerned?

President Clinton. I'm sorry, I'm not sure I understood the question. Could you repeat both questions again?

Q. Yes, one question actually. You seem to be the strongest supporter of Turkey's accession in the European Union. So the question is, do you believe or think that the permanent conditionality for Turkey's candidacy in the European Union should be, first, the solution of the Cyprus problem and, second, the acceptance of the jurisdiction of a Hague Court from Turkey?

President Clinton. Well, first of all, I believe--I have said this already--I believe that the disputes in the Aegean between Greece and Turkey should be referred to the International Court of Justice in The Hague or to some other mutually agreed on and generally recognized international dispute resolution mechanism. It seems to me that that is the only way that either side can have a resolution of this without appearing to cave in rather than just to let a neutral party, respected, decide it.

Secondly, I strongly support a resolution of the Cyprus issue. You're right. I am probably the strongest supporter in the West of Turkey's membership in the EU. I think I've also been the most vocal consistent supporter for 7 years of a resolution of Cyprus. I have worked as hard as I could on it and will continue to do so.

Now, when the parties meet in Helsinki, the members of the European Union--the United States is not a member--they will decide the conditions of Turkish candidacy if, in fact, they decide to grant Turkey candidacy.

But let me say, on the larger issue, my feeling is that the more Turkey is integrated into Europe and has the kind of dialog that we've seen recently with Greece, the more the climate improves, the more you can resolve these issues, the brighter the future for both countries will be. And as I told the Turks--I'm not saying anything to you I didn't say there--I do not think that bright future is achievable until there is a resolution of the Cyprus issue. These two countries need to go hand-in-hand into the future. And the festering disputes have to be resolved in order for that to happen.

Prime Minister Simitis. As I have indicated already, the Greek Government and I, personally, had a series of contacts. I have met and talked with all the Prime Ministers of the European Union member states on that issue. I have talked with them in order to determine

what would be the best way that would allow us to overcome problems in the future. It would be counterproductive, I believe, if today, whilst these talks are ongoing, we were to focus on one or the other point or issue. This would not facilitate the discussion.

I believe that in the future the time will come for us to determine all these aspects. But at present, restriction to one or two or three issues is not helpful. We must have a global approach and look at the final aim of this overall effort.

Thank you.

U.S. Trade Policy and Gov. George W. Bush of Texas

Q. Mr. President, yesterday George 'V. Bush laid out his foreign policy priorities. Specifically on China and Russia, he said they should be viewed as competitors of the United States rather than as strategic partners. I'm wondering what yourview is on that, and also, do you feel reassured that he has a view of the world that would make him an effective President?

President Clinton. You know, you guys keep trying to get me into this election. I am not a candidate. I'm not always happy about that, but I'm not.

Let me say this. I think we did the right thing to negotiate the WTO agreement with China, and apparently, Governor Bush agrees with that. I think that, as with all great countries, we are both competitors and partners. I think there is a problem with characterizing a country as a competitor if that means we know for sure that for the next 20 years there will be an adversary relationship.

We will have certain interests in common with China; we will have certain things we disagree with. We will support a lot of their domestic developments. We still have great trouble when people-free speech or religious rights are restrained.

With regard to Russia, we have a dif ference, as you know, and the OSCE conference made clear over the present policy in Chechnya, but we have a common interest in working together where we can. We have served side by side with Russian soldiers in the Balkans; we have seen the Russians withdraw their troops from the Baltics; we have seen a dramatic reduction in the nuclear capacity, the nuclear threat there. The Congress just gave us the funds to continue to reduce the nuclear threat with Russia. And we have worked with them on economic reform.

So I would say that in both cases there will be instances of competition, instances of partnership. But what we should be looking for is a world in which nations, including very large nations, define their greatness by the achievements of their people and by their ability to profit in their relations with other nations by bringing out the best in them, instead of by the traditional 19th and 20th century great power politics terms of defining their greatness in terms of their ability to dominate their neighbors or coerce certain people into certain kinds of behavior.

So I think we have to imagine–I have a whole different view of this–we should imagine what would we like the world to look like 50 year from now; what major countries will have an impact on that; how will we compete with them; how will we cooperate with them; what can we do that will most likely create the world we want for our grandchildren? That's the way I look at this.' So I don't have an either/or view of Russia or China. I have a both view, I suppose.

Prime Minister Simitis. May I make a philosophical comment on this? We should not be afraid of competitors. We should be afraid of ourselves when we are afraid of others.