

**STATEMENT BY H.E. KYRIAKOS MITSOTAKIS
PRIME MINISTER OF THE HELLENIC REPUBLIC
AT THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE 74TH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

Mr President,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Ambassador Bande, allow me to add my congratulations on your election as President of the 74th Session of the UN General Assembly.

It is a great pleasure for me to address the United Nations General Assembly for the first time as the leader of the people who first developed the values that most of the modern world embraces—democracy, individual rights, equal justice under law.

For the past decade, however, the story of the Greek people has suffered a series of misfortunes that have tested the will and mettle of our nation.

But we struggled and persevered and this past summer we opened a new chapter in our enduring saga; a chapter that will show once again what we are made of as a people and as a nation.

In national elections last July 7th, Greek voters gave my New Democracy Party the support to form a strong, majority government and the mandate to chart a new course for our country. A course that will build a more productive, more prosperous society able to offer our people new opportunities to realize their dreams and fulfil their destinies.

We have moved quickly to carry out that mandate. In less than three months, we ended capital controls, initiated measures to spur privatization and attract investment, and passed legislation to cut taxes, open markets, and reduce red tape.

And we are just getting started!

Mr. President, a new day has dawned in Greece, warmed by the clear light of reason and buoyed by winds of change and hope.

As we move to steer our country away from the storms that buffeted it for a decade, towards calm seas and bright horizons, we remain mindful of our place in the volatile region where we live, our role in the European Union whose ideals we inspired, and our responsibilities to the fragile world we all inhabit.

Given the multitude of today's challenges and perils, the role of the UN needs to constantly evolve and diversify in order to remain relevant and to promote freedom, prosperity, and peace in troubled regions.

Greece fully supports the Secretary General's efforts to lead the reforms needed to make the UN more effective. It is, indeed, time for the UN to enhance its ability to engage in preventive diplomacy, provide humanitarian assistance, to lead both peacemaking and peacekeeping

missions, as well as rebuilding shattered nations once conflicts are resolved. And it is crucial to do it all with greater transparency, efficiency and accountability.

I believe we would all agree that no matter how many peacemaking or peacekeeping operations are deployed in conflict areas, at the end of the day peace and security cannot prevail in the absence of development and inclusive growth.

Greece remains strongly committed to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to the long-term vision of a climate-neutral EU economy by 2050.

To achieve these goals, the Greek government has made addressing climate change a core component of its agenda. This is not just a defensive strategy to protect our forests from wildfires and our beaches from erosion and rising sea levels.

It is about leveraging our unique natural environment and cultural heritage as a comparative advantage that will lead to a new sustainable growth model.

To do so, we plan to adopt a new, ambitious National Strategy for Energy, Environment and Climate before the end of this year.

We will ban single-usage plastics across the country from 2021. We will close all our lignite power plants by 2028. We will press forward initiatives to protect our intangible cultural heritage from the impact of adverse climate conditions.

We will follow up on the International Summit on the impact of climate change on cultural heritage, which took place last June in Athens, by calling for a high level meeting next year to continue and expand on the work that begun at the Athens conference.

Mr. President,

For Greece, sustainable development and prosperity are also linked to the effective management of one of today's main challenges, the refugee crisis.

Situated at the external borders of the European Union, and, therefore, on the forefront of the migration and refugee crisis for several years now, Greece continues to be confronted with the biggest migrant and refugee flows to Europe since World War II.

We rank among the top four EU member-states in asylum applications and have one of the highest ratios of asylum seekers per capita. Despite the disproportionate burden and the resulting tremendous pressure on our reception and asylum systems, we have managed to save thousands of lives at sea.

We are deploying enormous efforts and resources, to the best of our abilities, in order to host refugees and migrants in a humane and decent way, respecting human rights and human dignity of both refugees and migrants arriving in our country.

But we are reaching the limits of our ability to address this problem.

Entry countries cannot and should not bear the burden of the migratory pressure on their own. Refugee and migration management is a European challenge that calls for collective

action, a comprehensive approach and broad solutions, based on fair sharing of responsibility and not on xenophobic agendas.

We need to state the obvious to our European partners in particular: Greece cannot bear alone the burden of massive movements of people fleeing wars and oppression, or simply seeking a better future.

These people do not have Greece as their final destination. They come to Europe through our Union's external borders, which happen to be our borders. The plight of these people cannot be turned into a weapon in the service of political goals by anyone anywhere.

The agreement between the EU and Turkey needs to be respected. Turkey needs to do much more to fulfil its end of the bargain. The recent drastic increase in the number of migrants crossing the Aegean is unacceptable.

Europe needs to continue supporting Turkey financially, thus recognizing that millions of refugees currently live in Turkey.

At the same time, the European Union needs to move fast to adopt new common rules for asylum seekers that will apply to all countries.

No European nation can be a member of the Schengen zone and benefit from the free movement of people, while at the same time refusing to participate in burden sharing arrangements regarding the migration crisis. Solidarity is not a one way street!

Mr. President,

The situation in the Middle East and North Africa represents a source of deep concern and should be addressed by the international community in a comprehensive manner.

It is tragic that eight years after the Syrian crisis erupted, the country continues to be a 'battlefield' for domestic, regional and international divisions with repercussions felt by all; first and foremost by the ill-fated Syrian people.

Greece sees no alternative to a political solution. We fully support an inclusive political dialogue in Geneva under UN auspices that will produce a framework agreement based on Security Council Resolution 2254 and that will allow not only the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland, but will also provide the basis for the start of the reconstruction of Syria.

On Libya, it is imperative to establish the security conditions that will allow the country to heal. As one of Libya's neighbors, Greece attaches particular importance to the international efforts to stabilize the country.

We fully support the UN Action Plan for Libya, as well as the recently announced Triple Action Plan. We believe they constitute a solid road map for achieving progress.

As a country that enjoys both longstanding ties to the Arab World and excellent relations with Israel, which Greece first recognized when my father was Prime Minister almost 30 years ago,

we believe that the Middle East Peace Process must remain alive and lead to a two-state solution, in the hope that one day the area can become 'a promised land' for all its people.

Mr. President,

It is often said that geography is destiny. Nevertheless, it is our responsibility to shape our destiny. Although my country is situated close to an extremely turbulent region, it remains a pillar of stability, actively promoting peace, security and cooperation.

Greece, along with the Republic of Cyprus, has established constructive trilateral schemes of cooperation with Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine.

Consistent with its stabilizing role in a region confronted with grave challenges, Greece remains fully committed to the principle of good neighbourly relations with all its neighbors.

However, no tangible progress in relations between two neighbouring countries can be achieved without full respect for International Law, including the International Law of the Sea, as well as International Treaties.

Actions that persistently challenge Greece's sovereignty and sovereign rights undermine the important principle of good neighbourly relations, contravene International Law, and seriously impede efforts towards a mutually beneficial relationship.

Forty five years have passed since the illegal Turkish invasion and occupation of over a third of the Republic of Cyprus' territory. An agreed, comprehensive, viable solution in accordance with UNSC Resolutions should put an end to this injustice.

We welcome President Anastasiadis' and Turkish Cypriot Leader Akinci's efforts to agree on the Terms of Reference for the resumption of negotiations to resolve the Cyprus Question.

It is up to them to decide what is good for their communities. They don't need any foreign tutelage.

As President Anastasiadis repeated in this Hall yesterday, the only acceptable solution is the evolution of the Republic of Cyprus into a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation with political equality, with a single sovereignty, a single international legal representation and a single citizenship.

Greece is ready to resume negotiations for the termination of the outdated, anachronistic 1960 System of Guarantees and unilateral "rights" of intervention and the withdrawal of the Turkish occupation troops from the island.

However, Turkey's illegal drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean and particularly within Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone and Territorial Waters, violate International Law.

They blatantly undermine ongoing efforts, under UN auspices, to restart the Cyprus negotiations, and dangerously escalate tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean. Gunboat diplomacy does not belong to the 21st century, but to the 19th.

Furthermore, recent Turkish actions and statements concerning the opening of Varosha under Turkish-Cypriot administration are in blatant violation of relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, which call for the return of all legal inhabitants in Varosha, under United Nations administration.

With respect to our neighbors to the north, Greece supports the effort of all the countries of the Western Balkans to join the European Union, as long as they fully respect their international obligations to the European Union and to their neighbors.

Greece is playing a vital role in the economic development of the entire Balkan region, thanks to the trade opportunities provided by its ports in Piraeus and Thessaloniki, as well as its position as a major investor in Southeast Europe.

Mr. President let me conclude by making the following observation. We naturally think of the UN whenever we are confronted by difficult problems. And, we are often quick to criticize the UN if it comes up short in handling them.

But for those who are caught in the middle of wars and revolutions, the UN is the only bulwark of safety they can count on, and to the millions of refugees around the world to whom it provides food and shelter, it is their only beacon of hope.

So I want to conclude my first appearance before the General Assembly by saluting the UN for the conflicts it has resolved, the suffering it has diminished, the pain it has eased all over the world.

Thank you, Mr. President.