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SPEECH OF DEPUTY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF GREECE MR. DIMITRIS MARDAS

First of all I would like to warmly thank the President, as well as the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Croatia for providing us an excellent opportunity for dialogue in areas of common interest.

It is an undisputed fact that, within the current geopolitical environment, our region is facing, among others, **3 major challenges** that need to be addressed effectively at the regional level: These are. The refugee/migration crisis (1), the need to proceed with further diversification of energy sources and supplies (2) and to enhance connectivity in the wider region (3).

However, before the expression of my point of view to the above mentioned issues, I would like to reply to the thesis of the Minister of Hungary about BREXIT. We have to know that for the shake of UK, we have violated one of the four principles establishing the EC in 1957, this of free movement of persons. In my opinion, we will see the unpleasant consequences of this decision on EU level, in the near future and besides, I consider that we offered to the UK many opportunities for remaining at the European family. We could not offer any more exemptions of the common rules. Consequently, it was not an error of the EU the decision about BREXIT.

Analytically, as for the three above mentioned challenges.

1. Regarding the 1st challenge, since 2015, Europe has been experiencing mainly a **refugee crisis**. Greece has developed all efforts to save human lives at sea, receive and treat people in a humane way and provide them with shelter and means of subsistence. However, because of **unilateral measures** taken by some countries, without any consultation on EU level, which led to the closure of the so-called Western Balkans migratory route, around 58.000 people have stranded in Greece. I have to point out here that articles 78-80 of the Treaty of Lisbon and Titles II and VII of the Stabilization and Association Agreements, referring to the Western Balkan countries, make specific provisions for cooperation, common actions and mutual consultations in this field on EU level. However, we have to apply practices inserted by Treaties and Agreements that we have agreed, by avoiding consequently all actions which show that we do not respect rules ratified, among others, by the national parliaments.

The migratory crisis has been a major challenge for all. As it **surpasses** the capacities of individual countries, it should be dealt with collectively and

in a coordinated way. It is, therefore, necessary for all of us to work together and devise, on the basis of shared responsibility, a coherent, effective and flexible response.

The management of the refugee crisis is the responsibility not only of neighbouring states to the conflict zones and of Europe, but also of the international community as a whole. Therefore, it is necessary that the latter demonstrates its solidarity in addressing the crisis by ensuring that all states undertake relevant commitments. The UN summits on migration organized on the sidelines of the 71st UNGA (the high-level summit to address large movements of refugees and migrants, on September 19 on the initiative of the UN Secretary General and besides the Leaders' Summit on Refugees hosted by the US President on September 20th) are an excellent opportunity to promote this goal.

2. Regarding the 2nd challenge, I would like to draw on the importance of **interconnectivity of energy infrastructures** for deepening the cooperation between our countries in South-East and Central Europe and further North in the Baltic. Energy sector is a key sector and a bridge for cooperation in our wider region and we have to pay excessive attention to that. Greece can play a dominant role in this field. The ports of the regions of Central , Eastern Macedonia and Thrace can be used for the fulfilment of this goal.

3. Finally regarding the 3rd issue, the abovementioned regional challenges, which are crucial for all Europe will not vanish quickly. The overall situation could become much worse. Concerning our region, the governments in all Western Balkan countries should redouble their efforts to address these challenges, including through their European and Euro-Atlantic integration course. They need to engage constructively to regional cooperation and establish true good **neighborly** relations, overcome age-old stereotypes and combat nationalisms, thereby building trust and confidence.

The main pillars of Greece's policy in the Western Balkans are the following:

- Support for the region's European and Euro-Atlantic integration
- Enhancing our bilateral relations with the Western Balkan countries based on the principles of regional cooperation and good neighborly relations
- Contribution to the region's economic development and growth.

- Promotion and implementation of major infrastructure projects on the sectors of energy and transport.

Greece will continue working systematically in order to sustain the EU focus on the region and to provide a more tangible European perspective to the Western Balkans, as we did in the past (Thessaloniki Agenda 2003, EU-Western Balkans Summit, 2014).

As regards regional cooperation, we consider that enhancing cooperation between Macro-regions can prove quite beneficial. This is also one of the goals of the Hellenic Chairmanship (since June 1st) of the EUSAIR, (EU Strategy for Adriatic and Ionian Refuges) as well as of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative.

Furthermore, Greece, being aware of the growing importance of the regional cooperation, is an active member of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), in which a wide number of countries of the South Eastern Europe and of the Black Sea area are involved. BSEC, the most inclusive and comprehensive organization of the region, can play a leading role and be the appropriate vehicle for an enhanced regional and cross border economic cooperation. There is no doubt that the Black Sea Region, being at a significant crossroad connecting Asia and Europe, constitutes an important geopolitical, economic and trade hub that attracts international interest. Therefore, active participation in BSEC is a critical driver for the economies of the countries of the said region, in promoting their sound economic and social development.