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**Seventy-Third Session**  
**of the General Assembly of the United Nations**  
**Agenda item 8**

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**Statement by**  
**H.E. Mr. Alexis Tsipras**  
**Prime Minister**  
**of the Hellenic Republic**

**NEW YORK**  
**Friday, September 28, 2018**

Madame President,  
Mr Secretary General,  
Distinguished Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Three years ago, when I first had the honor of addressing the Plenary of the General Assembly, I had underlined that Greece was at the forefront of three overlapping international crises.

Crises that had a severe impact on Greek society, economy and the country's diplomatic role in the region.

Greece was the country most hard-hit by the Eurozone crisis, losing 25% of its GDP, reaching over 27% unemployment and significant levels of poverty.

Greece was also the country that, per capita, carried the heaviest burden in Europe from the refugee crisis, as over 1,2 million people entered its islands within a period of a few months.

Greece found itself also at the center of a worsening crisis of destabilization in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean, with nationalism growing rapidly.

On the other hand, the question for me at the time of my speech in 2015 – as for all of us – was whether the UN, the international community and our international institutions, would be able to help overcome these common challenges through collective solutions.

The question was whether the EU, the ECB, the IMF, the World Trade Organization and the World Bank, would guide us to sustainable growth, help decrease poverty and promote more balanced global trade.

The question was whether the EU, the UNHCR, the IOM, would help to resolve the refugee and migration crisis, effectively and humanely.

The question was whether the UN, the EU, NATO or the OSCE would promote peace and stability, weaken international terrorism and resolve conflicts in my region and many others.

Nevertheless in the years that followed, what came to the fore was a very big “Trust deficit” vis-à-vis international and national institutions, as the Secretary General called it.

In this context, nationalist forces became stronger and stronger and succeeded, finally, in reframing the question.

Their aggressive stance highlighted that the question was not whether we can count on international institutions to solve common problems on the basis of common values, but whether these problems and values are common at all.

Their logic in confronting these crises was simple – “not in my backyard”.

In dealing with the Eurozone crisis, these forces called for Grexit and the need to make an example of Greece.

In dealing with the refugee crisis, they supported the unilateral closure of borders in the Balkan route, they demanded push backs in the sea and called for a small Schengen that excluded the front line EU countries.

In dealing with crises in the broader region the solutions they proposed were also simplistic – sanctions, preventive or humanitarian wars and when those led to a dead end, disengagement from the region and containment of problems to avoid spillover.

In Greece, we confronted dynamically, not only these challenges, but also these ideas and policies.

Not only did we manage to stay standing, overcoming these difficulties, but beyond that – we became part of the solution, rather than the problem, in Europe and the broader region.

We did this without succumbing to the directives of countries, forces and institutions that disregarded the will of the Greek people in favor of their own economic or geopolitical interests.

At the same time we did this without resorting to a nationalist politics that would lead us to leaving the Eurozone, escalating tensions with neighbours or violating human rights and international law.

Firstly, as regards the economy, we remained in the Eurozone but we carried out tough negotiations for an economic program that centered on necessary structural reforms and not on the perpetuation of punitive and exhausting austerity.

At the same time we protected labour rights, we are establishing a respectable minimum wage, while guaranteeing fiscal space to support the welfare state and those most vulnerable.

Today we have left behind us economic programs that perpetuated recession, our growth rates are at 2,1% this year, going on 2,5% next year, unemployment has fallen by 8%, tourism has reached over 34 million visits per year, we are overachieving on high budget surpluses, while investors' interest is growing steadily.

Greece is becoming a regional energy, commercial and transport hub, changing the energy map and developing its strategic assets.

Secondly, as concerns the refugee crisis.

We had to deal with the highest refugee flows in post-war European history.

We did this while respecting international law and human rights.

At the same time, though, we supported a difficult but necessary EU-Turkey statement.

We did not give in to nationalist and xenophobic voices that called for push backs in the sea or a superficial asylum process aimed at rejecting everyone.

But we also did not hesitate to accept that those who do not need international protection must return to their transit country in which they are safe.

We severely criticized those European countries that reject their responsibility in taking up their fair share of the burden.

Those countries that call for unity when it comes to having rights but, but see things differently when it comes to fulfilling responsibilities.

The people of Greece, despite their difficulties, opened their arms to incoming migrants, showing the world what solidarity means.

While our asylum authority – which didn't even exist five years ago – deals today with the highest per capita number of applicants in Europe.

Most importantly, today, deaths in the Aegean have nearly reached zero and migrant flows have fallen radically.

Thirdly, concerning the security crisis.

We confronted grave challenges because of the rapid destabilization, the strengthening of nationalism and increase in tensions in a region in which we already had important differences with neighbouring countries.

In this geopolitical context Greece retained a policy of protecting its sovereign rights and interests.

At the same time, though, it chose to become, together with Cyprus, the most important European pillar of peace, security and stability in the region.

We have established dynamic trilateral schemes of cooperation with Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine.

And we clearly gave the message that dialogue, cooperation and respect for international law, is the only way to foster stable bilateral relations and strengthen the prospects of the region.

We remained committed to this policy, also in our difficult relations with Turkey, refusing again and again to give in to nationalism and escalation of tensions.

A position that allowed us to free the important potential of our relations in security, migration, energy and the economy.

But at the same time, a position that made clear the need for respect of international law in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean.

In this context, we clearly expressed and express our full support for a just and viable solution to the Cyprus issue, on the basis of UN decisions. A solution that will be based on the framework of the UN Secretary General, where we left our important negotiations in Crans Montana.

In parallel, we are actively promoting stability and economic growth in the Balkans, through a policy of resolving issues with our neighbours that unlocks their perspective to join the EU and other international organizations of their choice.

Through our dialogue with Albania, but, most importantly, through the Prespes Agreement with our northern neighbor. An Agreement that is important not only for the region, but also as a model for the peaceful resolution of differences. An Agreement that did not come about through the strongest party imposing its will and interests on the other. But through a mutually acceptable arrangement that preserves the dignity of both sides.

Madame President,

I think today, it is high time that we, as an international community, reframe the question for our future:

The dilemma is not patriotism or globalism.

It is whether or not we will leave our world to a vicious circle of nationalist reaction and regression, which – as our history teach us leads to tragedy – or we will create the conditions for collective, progressive solutions that will respect national and popular sovereignty of each and every country.

Because a modern, democratic patriotic politics cannot be a politics of passive acceptance of the directives of unaccountable transnational elites.

No modern, democratic, patriotic politics can accept as given, an international order that reproduces inequalities of power and wealth, or protects the right of some to have enormous trade surpluses at the expense of others.

Where some countries impose their will and interests on others, in the name of common values no less.

This is our position in the Eurozone, this is our position towards humanitarian wars in the region and this is our position in relation to our differences with our neighbours.

On the other hand, though, a modern, democratic, patriotic politics has to be able to deal with 21<sup>st</sup> century global and regional challenges. Challenges that are common by their very nature and can only be dealt with collectively, on the basis of shared values.

We believe that a modern, democratic patriotic politics, must be based on collective arrangements and guarantees that preserve and promote peace, stability, sustainable growth and human rights.

It should not be based on a logic of unilateralism, nationalism and strengthening the powerful over the weak.

That means making sure that international organizations, including financial ones, become more accountable and respond to the actual needs of states and citizens.

It means supporting the Secretary General's vision for UN reform.

But it also means supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Global Compact on Migration, the Paris Accord on Climate Change and the Iran Nuclear deal, despite all its weaknesses.

It means finding a political solution in Syria on the basis of an inclusive political dialogue under UN auspices.

It means revitalizing the Middle East Peace Process aiming at a comprehensive solution that responds to Israel's just demand for security and the Palestinians' just demand for a state on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as their capital.

It means promoting the valuable dialogue between European and Euroatlantic institutions and member states with Russia, on the basis of mutual respect and with the goal of confronting international challenges and regional crises.

It means promoting peace and development in Africa, supporting countries that carry the biggest burden in hosting refugees – such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan - and confronting the root causes of migration.

It means supporting positive steps for a diplomatic solution on denuclearization in the Korean Peninsula.

It means – particularly as we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - pushing forward the human rights agenda.

As Greece has after all done: by granting citizenship to second generation immigrants born and raised in our country, by establishing the legal recognition of gender identity and the institutionalization of civil partnership and the deepening the rights of the muslim minority.

Madame President,

Nelson Madela, whose hundred years of birth we celebrate today, once said "it always seems impossible until it is done".

For the last 8 years Greece was hit hard by three global crises.

It confronted decisively, the logic that said each one of our countries has to deal alone with global challenges if they reach our doorstep.

Today, although Greece still faces big challenges in the economy, migration management and diplomacy, it stands again on its feet, bringing solutions to the region.

This would not have happened without a politics that asserts popular and national sovereignty, but also commits to collective solutions aimed at peace, stability and preserving human rights.

The challenge of our time is to find again this balance as an international community, confronting international forces that spread fear, hatred and – in the end- scale back the progress we have made collectively in the last 70 years.

And this is a genuinely modern, democratic and patriotic choice.

A choice whose aim will be to ensure that our countries progress and prosper, rather than be pitted against each other.

Our civilization as Greeks, leaves no space for doubt as to the choice we will support.

The Greek people will be standing, once again, on the right side of history.

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