

Monsieur le President,
Mr. Secretary General,
Heads of States and Governments,
Excellences,
Mesdames et Messieurs,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Seventy-seven years ago, this organization was founded out of the chaos of war with one stated aim: the harmonization of relations among nation states in pursuit of lasting peace and security, the defense of human rights and the inviolability of international law. It was the world's multilateral response to the aggression of the few at the expense of the many.

And yet, in spite of all its successes, today our 'United Nations' stands at a crossroads. As the theme of this year's General Assembly suggests, we face a '*watershed moment*' in world history. We face a choice. And that choice is simple.

We can come together to face down the forces of authoritarianism and violence of today, in full cognizance that there is a price to pay for defending our common human values. Or we can show indecision, we can waver, and ultimately, we can fold.

Choose the former, however painful in the short term that may be, and the values that underpin these United Nations will prevail. Choose the latter and the consequences are, I believe, unimaginable. **

For our societies to survive and thrive, they have to be willing to fight when faced with unprovoked aggression. Pericles in his funeral oration made that absolutely clear 2500 years ago. At no time after the end of the Second World War have his words echoed more relevant.

Today the memories of the Dark Continent have resurfaced after the unprovoked invasion of Russia into Ukraine. What we considered unthinkable has happened.

For many years we believed that international cooperation and a shared commitment to the rule of law had prevailed over guns and armies. We believed that given the tragic and devastating experiences of the twentieth century, no one would venture to suppress another people's right to exist or alter borders by force. We were wrong.

Nevertheless, as Europeans we have every reason to be proud of our response. We have stood by Ukraine, equipping it with means to defend itself against the aggressor. We have imposed punitive sanctions that are beginning to take a toll on the Russian economy. And the tide is beginning to turn.

This clear and strong position against an unjustified war is the reflection of a new geopolitical vision of the European Union. We don't want a world in which power is for the strong state and not for the weak, and where disputes are settled by generals rather than diplomats. **

Russia's invasion must not succeed. Not only for the sake of Ukraine. But also because it is imperative to send a clear message to other authoritarian leaders that open acts of aggression which violate international law shall not be tolerated by the global community of democratic states.

This message had been sent loud and clear by many heads of state and government who have taken the floor at this year's General Assembly.

Across Europe we face the prospect of a difficult winter. The impact of the war in Ukraine has sent the price of gas soaring and has unleashed a spike in inflation, the likes of which we have not seen in more than four decades.

Russia has weaponized its natural resources to cause pain on European societies and destabilize democratically elected European governments. Again, it will not succeed.

We will support our citizens to cope with high energy prices. We will pool European resources to promote energy efficiency and rapidly diversify away from Russian oil and natural gas.

And we will further accelerate the push towards renewables, which are not just the cleanest and cheapest form energy, but are also the safest ones from a geopolitical perspective. **

Never again must we mortgage our prosperity, only to be blackmailed by those who are willing to exploit our dependencies. This is, after all, what European strategic autonomy is all about.

We know that there is a price to be paid for being on the right side of history. And it is our obligation to keep our societies united but also informed about what is really at stake in Ukraine.

The fight against disinformation and fake news must continue with increased vigor. Pericles was correct when he said that “it is not easy to find the right measure of words when one cannot quite rely on a common perception of the truth”.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Ukraine is not the only country in post-war Europe to have been brutally attacked. For nearly 50 years, Cypriots have lived on a divided island as the result of an illegal invasion and a military occupation.

Ankara and the Turkish-Cypriot leadership, isolated and alone in the international community, continue to insist upon unacceptable demands for a two-state solution. They refuse to resume negotiations for an agreed settlement on the basis of successive Security Council Resolutions. **

Greece strongly supports both the Secretary General's efforts to resume negotiations for a mutually acceptable settlement, and the Confidence Building Measures proposed by the President of the Republic of Cyprus, Nikos Anastasiadis.

But the international community must not ignore illegal Turkish attempts to impose a new fait-accompli on Cyprus, in particular in the fenced area of Varosha, as well as new and repeated violations of Cyprus' maritime zones and airspace.

Which brings me, ladies and gentlemen, to an issue even closer to home for my country. I am referring to Turkiye's continued and ever more aggressive revisionist agenda vis a vis Greece.

This is my fourth address to the General Assembly as Greek Prime Minister. You have heard me say before that I am always open to dialogue, and to the settling of differences in an open, respectful manner, and in accordance with international law. This is still the case.

Turkiye after all is an important country, a NATO member, which can be a partner and ally of Greece and the European Union, if it so chooses.

Turkiye has great capacity to play a constructive role. For example, Ankara's recent efforts that led to a successful UN brokering of a grain exports deal between Ukraine and Russia is an important contribution to global food security. **

But at the same time, Turkiye continues to play a destabilizing role in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Caucasus. It is also the only NATO country not implementing sanctions against Russia.

When it comes to Greece, Turkiye's leadership seems to have a strange fixation with my country. Their language is increasingly bellicose. They threaten that Turkiye will "come at night", if it so decides. This is the language of an aggressor not a peacemaker. Sadly, it is nothing new.

And what of Turkiye's challenge to the Greek sovereignty in the Aegean itself? Again, this rhetoric not new. Turkiye has been incrementally building a comprehensive narrative of false claims in the Aegean that stretches from the Imia islet crisis in the mid-1990s to the present day.

It has been threatening Greece with a casus belli, should we choose to exercise our sovereign right to expand out territorial waters in the Aegean.

This narrative has culminated in Turkiye's preposterous challenge, last year, of Greek sovereignty over the Eastern Aegean islands, including islands such as Chios and Rhodes, a sovereignty which was established by international treaties 100 years ago. **

What is particularly alarming is the growing intensity of the threat. It is characterized by an escalation in aggressive rhetoric. Combined with a massive disinformation campaign. Multiple violations of Greece's sovereignty and sovereign rights at sea and in the air, the instrumentalization of migration flows, and a unilateral decision to refuse all high-level contacts.

And I ask. Is this behavior compatible with a well-established international actor, a UN member state, bound by the UN Charter and principles?

Such actions undermine peace and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean at a time when the international community is faced with a war in Ukraine.

If President Erdogan wants to talk about red lines, then I say this: Turkish claims over the sovereignty of Greece's islands are baseless and unacceptable.

Questioning the sovereignty of Greek territory crosses a red line for all Greeks. As Prime Minister of Greece, I will never compromise on my country's territorial integrity, security and stability. Greece will not be bullied by anyone.

And yet, it does not have to be this way. There is another path forward. Greek people and Turkish people also have a history of peaceful coexistence. 8 years after the tragic events of 1922, Greek and Turkish leaders had the courage to sign a Peace and Friendship Agreement. **

That is why today I would like to address not just the Turkish leadership but also the Turkish people directly with this message: Greece poses no threat to your country. We are not your enemy. We are neighbors. We value the many friendships between ordinary Greeks and Turks.

I know that the vast majority in our two countries do not want political conflict and hostility. So, let us move forward in a spirit of cooperation and friendship, with mutual respect, and in accordance with international law.

Let me also make a specific reference to the migration situation in the Aegean. Turkiye has been instrumentalizing migrants since March 2020, when it actively encouraged and facilitated tens of thousands of desperate people to illegally cross into Greece in order to put pressure on the European Union.

I want to be absolutely clear. Greece will continue to protect its borders, with full respect to fundamental rights. Our Coast Guard has saved tens of thousands of people at sea. It did so again yesterday when we rescued more than 130 people, including many children, from two sinking boats in the Aegean.

It would be more useful for Turkiye to cooperate actively with Greece and Europe on the issue of migration rather than spreading fake news. After all, the boats carrying the same desperate people President Erdogan keeps referring to leave the Turkish coast in broad daylight... **

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me conclude with a point about meeting the momentous challenge of climate change.

The green transformation sits at the heart of my government's reform programme. Our National Climate Law aims to mobilize all sectors of the economy as we establish a roadmap for our transition to net zero by 2050.

The conversion of a number of Greek islands into green innovation hubs is up and running.

And for Greece there is another fight close to our hearts. The battle to protect cultural heritage, not just from climate change, but from armed conflict, illicit trafficking and its interconnection with terrorist financing, and religious fundamentalism.

Greece, in partnership with UNESCO and the WMO, has launched "Addressing Climate Change Impacts on Cultural and Natural Heritage", an initiative supported by more than 100 member-states, the Secretary General, the Council of Europe and the UNFCCC. We invite all member states to join us in this effort. **

And, I'm pleased to say that in our long and continuing effort to reunite the Parthenon Sculptures we have received support from the vast majority of member states, as well as from UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee.

We thank you for that support. No matter how long it will take, the Parthenon Sculptures will eventually be coming home.

Distinguished delegates,

I am immensely proud of the fact that Greece is one of few countries who have not deviated from any of the UN's 17 Sustainability Goals for 2030. Let me highlight in particular our commitment to transforming public education, in line with Goal Number 4. Our efforts have been recognized at this year's assembly.

As the world's leading shipping nation, we understand that the sustainability of our marine environment is of paramount importance. Which is why in 2024 we will be hosting the 9th International "Our Ocean Conference", building on our ambitious plans to promote sustainable fishing and protect 30% of our land and sea by 2030.

All these initiatives prove that collective multilateral solutions can make a significant difference in the battle to protect our natural world. **

But we are not there yet. Whether it be the terrifying wildfires we witnessed in Europe this summer, or more recently the unprecedented flooding that affected large parts of Pakistan, or the continued loss of critical icecaps, glaciers and rainforests, without multilateral cooperation, these events may soon be the norm rather than the exception.

Greece is taking the lead in making sure that European countries cooperate more effectively in the field of civil protection through the RescEU program.

As the United Kingdom hands on the baton and the work of COP26 to Egypt for COP27, we have a final chance to get this right. Let us not be asking at the next General Assembly why we are still talking and not acting.

The challenges our world faces are complex and multifaceted. The solutions are far from simple. They require compromise and effort and will. They require resolve and determination. Above all, they require us to work together and stay the course. That after all in the spirit of these United Nations. **

In the pursuit of freedom, in the preservation of democracy and the rule of law, and in the fight against climate change, there is a long road ahead.

The next generations will judge us harshly should we fail to rise to the occasion.

Thank you.