

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nikos Dendias, intervention during the 16th Economist Cyprus Summit “Europe: Putting solidarity to the test – Cyprus: In need of a new growth model?”

It is a great pleasure for me to participate in the 16th Cyprus Summit organized by The Economist.

Albeit held virtually, it remains a welcome opportunity to have an exchange with such prestigious interlocutors on important issues of mutual interest.

As is energy and how the search for and exploitation of new energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean are affected by and, at the same time, affecting the geopolitical state of play.

And whether the countries and peoples of the region can hope for arrangements that will be beneficial to all.

In this regard, I believe that we should be approaching the energy question in our wider region - and, quite frankly, everywhere - in connection to regional stability and regional development.

Two sets of notions - energy on one hand, regional stability and development on the other - that are perfectly intertwined in a cause and effect circular movement.

Because in order to be able to exploit energy resources you need to have stability and once you do, you can have more development.

To most countries of the region this is evident. Greece is one of them, Cyprus is another.

And I should say that in particular Greece and Cyprus' approach is not limited to just energy issues.

Our orientation towards peace, security, stability and development for all is a foreign policy choice of both countries.

Our commitment to regional stability and development has, after all, been at the very core of a significant number of trilateral and multilateral schemes of cooperation we have established in our region.

Schemes whereby we have been promoting multi-sectoral synergies, thus deepening partnerships i.e. with Egypt, Israel, Jordan, the UAE and many others.

These partnerships are open to all, as long as they respect:

(a) International Law, obviously including the Law of the Sea, ascribe to and respect in practice, not just in words,

(b) the principles of the UN Charter, such as the territorial integrity of other countries.

But of course, it is not just Greece and Cyprus; there are others who feel the same and act the same.

There is Egypt, for instance, that proposed turning the EastMed Gas Forum, an Egyptian initiative to begin with, into a regional Organization.

This newly-founded Forum has already attracted the positive attention of major regional and international actors in the field, including the US.

And, of course, there is tangible proof of this stance on the bilateral level.

Such as the agreements on the delimitation of exclusive economic zones Greece signed this past June [9/7] and August [6/8] with Italy and Egypt respectively, as well as the agreement with Albania to refer the issue to the International Court of Justice.

As well as similar agreements signed by Cyprus on the one hand and Egypt, Lebanon and Israel on the other.

These are perfect examples of what it means to be committed to peacefully negotiating in good faith, in accordance with international law and towards reaching compromises for exploiting energy resources.

The EastMed Pipeline Project is another example of what would be, once concluded, a major, large scale development in the field of energy in our region.

Greece, Cyprus and Israel, in this case, have already signed the relevant accord and hopefully Italy will join us, sooner rather than later.

But, regrettably, against those who look at energy as an important opportunity for regional stability and development, stand those who do not.

Those who look at the energy resources or the possibility of energy resources as an opportunity to promote their dominance aspirations in the region, in the context of their neo-ottoman agenda.

There are the policies and means used today by Turkey.

Through its direct involvement in all crises in the region in Syria and in Libya,

Its interference in the domestic affairs of countries of the region Iraq and its ill-based effort to antagonize others Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE,

Its aggressive and divisive rhetoric, as well as its suspicious affiliations,

Its instrumentalisation of migration and religion,

Its violation of Greece and Cyprus' sovereignty and sovereign rights,

Its continued provocations in contempt of the international law and UNSC Resolutions, as was the recent so called "picnic" in a city the Turkish invasion and occupation since 1974 turned into a ghost.

Turkey is responsible for further endangering stability, even threatening peace, in an already volatile area.

But, this event is focusing on Cyprus.

And further what Nikos Christodoulides said, it is important to stress that Ankara has approached energy findings off Cypriot coasts as an opportunity.

Not to discuss or negotiate a peaceful settlement of the Cyprus Question, but an opportunity to escalate tensions and violate Cyprus' sovereignty and sovereign rights.

An opportunity to blackmail the Government of Cyprus into illegal, in terms of international law, options.

Of course, Turkey's sorry-attempt-of-an-excuse, as regards Cyprus, is that it acts with the rights of the Turkish-Cypriots at heart.

When, in fact, it is exactly the opposite; the Turkish Cypriots are also victims of Turkey's agenda.

But when one compartmentalizes Turkish policies against Cyprus, as Turkey attempts to, as, in this case, in the field of energy, one sometimes misses the bigger picture, the basics:

Turkey does not even recognize the Republic of Cyprus, a UN member; a member-state to the EU, an Organization that Turkey is, in theory, attempting to also become a member of.

Greece is obviously no stranger to Turkey's idea of, quote, "protecting its rights", when, in fact, it is not its rights to protect.

It is about usurping others' rights.

Since August, we have been faced with an explosive situation in the Eastern Mediterranean, due to consecutive NAVTEXes, issued by Turkey.

All for research activities in areas overlapping Greek continental shelf.

As a result, the Turkish seismic research vessel Oruc Reis is performing illegal activities, thus violating the law of the sea.

Turkey's illegal actions are a clear demonstration of its attempt to create faits accomplis in the region.

So, to answer the question “is there hope for mutual understanding?”.

Not if Turkey continues like this; against Greece, Cyprus, against the whole region for that matter.

Not as long as there is not respect to international legality by all actors.

The answer could be yes if Turkey changed attitude and adhered to international legality.

And it is a shame because energy can be such a game changer in terms of stability and development; in the Eastern Mediterranean, you cannot have enough of those.

Especially at a time where the EU is also stepping up its energy diplomacy efforts. And the EU is not alone.

This energy transition in-the-making across the globe will, no doubt, have huge geo-political and geo-economic implications.

The goals are the same: diversification of energy resources, security of energy supply and the need to modernize and develop new energy infrastructure.

In other words energy has the potential to change everything.

It can be an opportunity for stability and development or an excuse for more heterogeneity, fragmentation and inequality.

In layman's terms: what separates a dream from a nightmare?
Content.

In this case, the content we will be choosing to give our energy aspirations.

Will we be choosing the road of diplomacy, cooperation, synergies and international law or the path of unilateral, gunboat diplomacy, faits accomplis and exercise of power?

Tell me that and I'll tell you if there is hope and how much of it.

Thank you.