

SUNDAY 28TH JUNE 2009 - PLENARY SESSION

MINISTER BAKOYANNIS OPENING REMARKS

Dear colleagues,

In the year 433 BC, the Battle of Sybota took place just across the sea channel which lies between Corfu and the Epirus mainland. It was by far the largest naval battle fought between Greek city-states until that time and the immediate catalyst of what was later called the Peloponnesian war - an all-out struggle between Athens and Sparta that after 27 years destroyed the former, corrupted the latter, and wrecked Greece.

Thucydides, an Athenian general and historian, who fought during the war, set out to write what happens when human societies confront themselves in an all-out struggle. But he did not limit his description to giving us only an account of what happened at the battlefield. He also described the devastation of the environment, the abuse of human lives, the collapse of the economy.

Thucydides claimed that his history was not an essay written for the purpose of obtaining the applause of the moment but was intended to become “a possession for all time”. He knew that the story of mankind is a continuous and repetitive cycle.

We all know all too well what happens when human societies confront themselves. And although today we enjoy the fruits of peace, open wounds remain in our Continent and beyond.

Our societies, after painful negotiations, managed to set the pace towards a lasting peace by adopting a corpus of principles that constitute an *acquis* beyond doubt. It is an *acquis* that forms the cornerstone of our cooperative security which is fundamental for our well being.

This is the reason we have gathered here in Corfu.

Yesterday evening, we had the opportunity to discuss, over dinner, the state of play of our common, comprehensive and indivisible security. We agreed that there are serious challenges, although there is clearly a divergence of views on their root causes. Irrespective of who is right and who is wrong, the reality is that, even today, protracted conflicts, ethnic tensions and unresolved border disputes continue to plague considerable parts of the OSCE region. Democratic transition processes, in some OSCE countries, need to maintain their pace and in certain cases require fresh impetus; Europe's basic structure of arms control and confidence-building mechanisms, including the CFE regime, need to return fully on track. Perhaps most seriously, tension and mistrust within the wider Europe continue to inhibit the region's solidarity in facing down shared global threats stemming from areas adjacent to the OSCE.

It is symptomatic of the current situation that, while the need for a European security dialogue at the highest level is quite obvious, the participants have yet to reach agreement on the aims, content and framework of such a dialogue.

Our intention today is to rise above the blame-game and reach out for common solutions in order to provide a targeted impulse to the dialogue on European security. This will give a concrete form to the process launched in Helsinki last December. And I can assure you that the Greek Chairmanship, which, from the outset, has spared no effort to generate the conditions and provide the framework for this much needed and long overdue dialogue, remains fully committed to this process.

Today, we have to explore ways on how to launch a meaningful and result-oriented process.

We need to reconfirm our collective achievements in the field of comprehensive and indivisible security. At the same time, we should not hide the shortcomings or the failures in addressing 21st century challenges. Nor should these failures hamper our sincere will to overcome deep-rooted notions and longstanding misconceptions about outdated notions of security concerns.

Along similar lines, a joint assessment of the current threats and challenges will be a valuable tool to shape a common

perspective on how we envisage European security in a decade from now.

Over the last ten years, European security policy has been increasingly dominated by unilateral and frequently confrontational approaches. This is a far cry from the principle of co-operative security, to which the OSCE States committed themselves in the 1990 Charter of Paris. The loss of trust has been enormous. Even if European security relations should now improve, it may take years to overcome all the problems and conflicts that have been created.

It does not require a great deal of imagination to recognize that the current financial and economic crisis is probably the most immediate and serious threat to international security that we currently face. The only way OSCE participating States will be able to meet it is if they show solidarity with one another, which is easier said than done, when every state is concerned above all with its own problems. But if we do not conjure up this solidarity, one day we may all suffer as a result.

So, let us start the process, through a structured dialogue, anchored in the OSCE.

The OSCE with its inclusive membership and comprehensive concept of security encompassing all three dimensions, is the natural forum for a dialogue of this kind. For that reason, we as the representatives of its participating States should do everything to grasp the opportunity to ensure that the OSCE

becomes the forum and framework for a European security dialogue.

In taking the dialogue forward, we must remember that bridging differences takes time. When the Heads of State and Government of the CSCE met in Helsinki in 1975, the participating States had held more than 2400 meetings in Geneva, and deliberated on 4,660 proposals. So, we may be at the beginning of what may be a long and arduous process.

Dear Colleagues,

Thirty five years after the Helsinki Final Act the vision of a ‘Europe whole and free, and at peace with itself’ remains still a goal rather than a reality, but it is definitely within reach. Here in Corfu, just a stone’s throw away from Homeric Ithaca, our joint Odyssey for European Security is just beginning.

Thank you.