

Dora Bakoyannis: Greece will act as an “honest broker”



Munich Security Conference, 7 February. OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Dora Bakoyannis (left) chairs a panel discussion on the future of European security. To her left are: US Congresswoman Jane Harman, Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia V. Tymoshenko and British Foreign Secretary David Miliband.

Taking over the symbolic torch from Finland in January, the Greek Chairmanship wasted no time in tackling a number of sensitive issues, such as renewal of the mandate of the OSCE Mission to Georgia, pursuing dialogue on the future of European security and strengthening the Organization's legal framework.

“We are committed to acting as an ‘honest broker’ in addressing some of the divisions that have opened up among the Organization's 56 participating States in recent years,” said the new Chairperson-in-Office, Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis, in her first address to the Permanent Council in Vienna on 15 January.

Not quite a week later, she flew to Moscow for talks with her Russian counterpart, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, on proposals to continue the presence of the OSCE in the region. “The situation in some regions of Georgia remains volatile. Incidents are occurring frequently. I firmly believe that the current situation requires *more*, not less, OSCE presence,” she said.

“Greece is striving for a consensus solution to strengthen security in the region, to offer the Organization's unique experience on the ground, including through its 28 military monitoring officers, and to make a significant contribution to the lives of all the people, irrespective of their ethnic origin.”

The Minister swiftly demonstrated her plans to engage in shuttle diplomacy, appointing a Special Representative, Greek diplomat Charalampos Christopoulos, who visited Tbilisi and Tskhinvali on 12 and 13 January. Ambassador Christopoulos discussed the resumption of natural gas supplies to South Ossetia, which had been disrupted since 8 August last year. The gas supply resumed on 25 January due to the efforts of the OSCE.

Another humanitarian problem in the region was the supply of water. Minister Bakoyannis said that the Greek Chairmanship planned to assess the water supply infrastructure as soon as weather conditions permitted.

Minister Bakoyannis' hectic pace of travel did not slacken in February. In the first week alone, she paid a visit to Belgrade and Pristina, and then went on to the Security Conference in Munich, where she chaired a panel discussion on “NATO, Russia, Oil, Gas and the Middle East: The Future of European Security”.

At the start of the panel discussion, the Chairperson-in-Office said that the crisis in Georgia demonstrated the need to intensify efforts to deal with the region's outstanding conflicts.

“We must not waste any time and move forward with the toolbox that we have in our hands,” she said. “We have two tools here: the EU, as proven by the intervention of the French Presidency last August, and the OSCE, which finds itself in the unique position of being the only European security organization that can rely on the political will and the resources of all the major stakeholders.”

On 9 February, Minister Bakoyannis visited Tirana, where she encouraged the Albanian Government to continue with reforms and with its progress towards Euro-Atlantic integration, and reaffirmed the OSCE's support for these goals. “Our 2009 OSCE Chairmanship will benefit the Western Balkans as a whole, as well as Albania specifically,” she said. “For Greece, it would be a great success if by the end of the year — the end of our Chairmanship — our neighbourhood were a more prosperous and more stable European region.”

— **Virginie Coulloudon, Deputy Spokesperson in the OSCE Secretariat**

Vienna, 15 January 2009.
The OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis (centre) with the 56 Heads of Delegation to the OSCE and Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut (far right).



The following are excerpts from the first address of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis, to the Permanent Council of the OSCE.

COMMITMENT

Greece assumes the OSCE Chairmanship at a time when the quest for security in our region has become ever more complex, and when rapid, unpredictable change seems to be the only constant in international relations. In these circumstances, I believe the OSCE remains a vital point of reference within the UN framework. The OSCE is the only regional forum that encompasses the wider Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian regions. It is also rooted in a unique, ambitious concept of security based upon shared values, agreed commitments and the fundamental dignity of the individual.

In 2009, Greece is committed to act as an “honest broker” in addressing some of the divisions that have opened up among our participating States in recent years. Openness, transparency, and the will to build consensus will guide our efforts.

In an evolving international environment, we will seek to make a difference by upholding the values, principles and rules of the OSCE. Together, these constitute the driving force of this Organization and the basis for our co-operative security.

GEORGIA

...Let me say that I see in the crisis in Georgia both a challenge and an opportunity. This crisis has shaken us out of our complacency, and reminded us that our job is not done. It therefore provides us with the opportunity to look afresh at the mechanisms we have created, to re-dedicate ourselves to the full implementation of our agreed commitments, and to consider new ways to build indivisible security. A priority of the Greek Chairmanship will be to undertake all necessary actions to promote the prevention and peaceful settlement of conflicts... In all cases, Greece is committed to working with all sides in a spirit of openness and driven by the desire for dialogue aiming at practical results.

The future of the OSCE presence in Georgia requires our special attention. As of 1 January, the Mission finds itself in a phase of technical closure. However, it is evident that the situation on the ground and throughout the region requires *more* OSCE presence, not less. The Greek Chairmanship is committed to maintaining a meaningful OSCE presence in the region. We are striving for a consensus solution, based on OSCE principles and commitments. The OSCE has a long tradition of imaginative and flexible solutions, but these can only work if there is good will and political courage on all sides.

PRIORITIES

The OSCE security dialogue remains a vital tool for early warning and crisis management... Greece is concerned by the continuing lack of clarity over the future of the CFE Treaty. This Treaty must remain a cornerstone of European security, and Greece will do all it can to retain and improve this most important foundation of military transparency and predictability...

The OSCE has a key role to play in the fight against terrorism. I am pleased to underline our intention to promote the implementation of OSCE counter-terrorism commitments, with full respect to the rule of law and human rights. We will also work hard to support the implementation and further development of OSCE commitments in border security and policing. We believe that deepening OSCE engagement with Afghanistan should remain a priority in 2009 and beyond.

Our States and societies face difficult challenges in the economic and environmental spheres. This year's Seventeenth Economic and Environmental Forum will examine the cross-dimensional aspects of the migration phenomenon. Uncontrolled migratory movements represent a significant challenge to participating States, and I look forward to a results-driven dialogue as we proceed to the meeting in Athens in May.

In the human dimension, the Greek Chairmanship will seek to strengthen the broad thematic area of the rule of law, guided by a more sober and structured approach. Greece will also give priority attention to gender equality and mainstreaming. It is my belief that the empowerment of women and a stronger emphasis on the need to respect their rights can trigger positive developments within participating States, and positively affect their capacity to fulfil their commitments.

In the area of tolerance and non-discrimination, the Greek Chairmanship will devote particular attention to the situation of the Roma and Sinti as well as the fight against hate crimes. Freedom of religion and human rights education will also be given prominence.

Greece is dedicated to maintaining the highest standards for OSCE election observation activities. This year will see important elections in the OSCE region, and it is essential that election observation remains a flagship activity of the Organization. Co-operation between the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Parliamentary Assembly remains a key to success.