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Interview with Ambassador Dimitrios Kypreos, Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia

It's time for a decisive step

The moment is right to move from general to true confidence in the region

To the question of what will be the focus of his efforts as Head of Mission who knows the Balkans extraordinarily well and comes from a neighbouring country, Ambassador Dimitrios Kypreos, in his first interview with the media in Serbia in his capacity as the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, pointed out the strengthening of democracy and institutions in the country, the rule of law and the security services, and last but not least, the media.

Q: I presume you have already noticed that both politicians and the public in Serbia are very sensitive when regional cooperation is being discussed, because they fear that this primarily pertains to Kosovo as a condition for Serbia's accession to the EU.

When it comes to Kosovo, the OSCE, not just the Mission to Serbia, but the entire organization, has a very clear position – it is status neutral. I would say that Kosovo issue relates not only to Serbia, but to all the countries in the region. A few days ago, at the economic summit in Belgrade, which was also attended by the Serbian Prime Minister, I said that it is the right time to make a decisive step regarding the question of regional cooperation, to move from general to true, firmly grounded confidence, cooperation and mutual “interdependence” in a positive sense.

Q: In which areas is it easiest to develop this mutual trust and “interdependence”?

This should be first and foremost done with issues that are of common interest for Serbia and its neighboring states. An excellent example is the ministerial-level regional conference on the fight against organized crime, organized recently by the Serbian government. Until recently, this was an unimaginable situation. In this way, I think, true confidence and interdependence are achieved. A second example is Corridor 10, which shows that EU member states can easily co-operate in the region. To continue in this direction means definitely reaching the point of genuine trust and mutual interdependence.

Q: Given that you are from Greece, can you give us some details from the “Athens Road Map” that envisages the Western Balkans entering the EU in 2014?

At the moment, I cannot speak from the Greek position, i.e. as a person coming from this friendly country, since I am here in the capacity of a representative of 56 participating states of the OSCE. But I can give you my personal opinion. The Western Balkans region is of particular importance for security, and I don't mean regional security only. I am of the opinion that the Western Balkans region belongs to a wider context of the South Eastern Europe, and, as such, belongs to Europe as well.

Q: What seems to be the greatest challenge in your view? There is a prevalent public sentiment that the reform of the judiciary will be huge problem.

I would not give priority to any single issue, because all democratic institutions are very important. Judiciary, police and other security structures are equally important and interdependent. This goes for media as well, because, as I already said, I consider them not less important and to have enormous influence. Media not only inform the public, but, in some way, they also create public opinion and educate the public. Therefore, I would not want to say that one area is more important than the other.

Q: Even though you have only just arrived, I believe that you are familiar with the Public Information Law. Do you think that this law has diminished the media's influence and power to shape politics?

Concerning this issue, we are at the moment co-operating with the Serbian government, i.e. with the relevant ministries, by investing our knowledge and will to assist in order to achieve the desired goal.

Q: What is this goal?

I'm thinking of proper functioning of media in Serbia and the way this is regulated in other societies as well. It is difficult to say what the best practice is, because every society has its problems, as well as specific needs and conditions in which it functions. I would say that the ultimate goal is a good law that will be in full compliance both with what Serbia needs and with international laws.

Hope and optimism from the nineties

Q: You played an interesting role in the mediation mission of Lord Owen during the war in BiH, where you had an opportunity to meet all the politicians from that time. If that mission had succeeded, the entire region would have looked different today.

A: I could not speculate on that subject, because history cannot be transformed into science-fiction. Perhaps the Vans-Owen plan was not the maximum of what we wanted it to be at the time, but at this moment I can share with you three things about this plan. First, all international negotiators I met then did everything with the very best intentions. Second, the goal back then was to, as soon as possible, put an end to destruction and crimes. And the third goal was an

attempt to preserve the element of multi-ethnicity from the former Yugoslavia to the greatest extent possible under the given state of affairs.

Q: How useful was this experience to you?

I must say that, without any exaggeration, this experience has made a mark on me in many ways.

Q: What have you learned from the 1990s in the Balkans?

First of all, hope and optimism. During 2005 and 2006, I was the coordinator for the process of co-operation in South Eastern Europe. This means that, ten years later, I had an opportunity to return to this region and see in what ways it has changed. Moreover, I can say that some of the actors of the story from the 1990s, very familiar to me, were still part of the game. But the atmosphere, the topics that we were discussing and the goals we were striving for, were completely different now. I can tell you that I used to say to myself: “Thank God, my region has made progress after all.”

Biography:

Ambassador Dimitrios Kypreos

Ambassador Dimitrios Kypreos from Greece took up his position as Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia in September this year. He has served as Greek Ambassador to Hungary, Russian Federation and Germany. Earlier, during his diplomatic career, he served as Greek Consul in Frankfurt and Milan, Paris and Prague. Regarding South Eastern Europe, Ambassador Kypreos acted as EU Presidency Liaison Officer at the International Conference on the former Yugoslavia (1994) and worked as part of the group supporting Lord Owen. More recently, in 2005 and 2006 he was Co-ordinator of the South Eastern European Co-operation Process (SEECp) during the Greek Chairmanship, and National Co-ordinator at the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. He holds a degree in Law and Economics from Athens University. Apart from the Greek language, he is fluent in English, French, Italian, German and Russian.

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