

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

COLLECTIVE SECURITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
BUILDING NEW BRIDGES

Washington, D.C.

Monday, February 23, 2009

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. TALBOTT: -- as well this afternoon, I can't resist the temptation to single out Senator Paul Sarbanes as a particular friend both of the Institution and of several of us here.

Paul, thank you so much for being here this afternoon.

It's my great honor to be able to say a few words of welcome and introduction to Foreign Minister Bakoyannis.

I've had a chance to get to know her a little bit in recent weeks. We were together not long ago at the Munich Security Conference, and she had the unenviable task, which I must say she performed with great skill, of what I would call herding lions which is sometimes the way I think of my job here at Brookings. That is she presided as a chair and as a moderator over a panel of heads of state and heads of government from various countries and managed to steer them in the direction of an extremely lively and constructive and coherent conversation about some of

the big issues of our day, including ones that I'm sure she's going to touch upon in her remarks.

Both her past career and her current capacities make her someone that we would want to listen to at any time and particularly at the present moment. She was the first woman mayor of a city that gave the world both the word and the concept of democracy. She is, of course, currently the Foreign Minister of Greece.

Greece is not just an important ally of the United States, an important member of the European Union, but it is also, by virtue of its geography, its history, its culture, notably including its political culture, a bedrock of Europe and a leader in the task of reaching out and expanding eastward what might be called the political as opposed to the geographic West. And that includes reaching out to a large, important, culturally Islamic country immediately to the east. The government, of which the Foreign Minister a part, is steering a brave -- and that means, among other things, domestically often unpopular --

chorus of strong and consistent support for Turkey's accession to the European Union.

Currently, as you know, Greece and, therefore, she have the position of being the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE. This is an extraordinarily important and often underappreciated institution, part of a legacy that goes back decades, that played an absolutely key role in ending the Cold War.

But like a great number of international institutions, the OSCE is facing some strain, and that is because, among other things, the structures of regional and global cooperation and integration around the world are under stress as a result of the worldwide recession. And because of that stress, there has been a rise of national, if not nationalist, sentiments in many countries, undercutting progress in the direction of international integration and cooperation.

The OSCE is also under pressure from a few of its own member states regarding some of the core

functions of the organization, notably that embodied by the Office on Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

So, all of that constitutes the backdrop of the Foreign Minister's visit here to Washington. She is meeting, of course, with Secretary Clinton. She'll be meeting with the National Security Advisor, General Jones, with the National Security Council and with other representatives of a new American administration that is committed to resuscitating multilateral institutions and diplomacy including those institutions that give the United States and Greece a chance once again to make common cause, notably to make common cause on the subject that she is about to address which is collective security in the 21st Century.

Madam Minister, thank you again for being with us.

(Applause)

MINISTER BAKOYANNIS: Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

Senator, Congressman, thank you.

I would like to thank the Brookings Institution and particularly Strobe Talbott for their invitation. It's an honor for me to address such a distinguished audience.

Let me begin with the obvious. I think we all agree that 2009 will be a critical year. It could be the beginning of the end or the end of the beginning of an incredibly challenging time.

The global financial and economic crisis casts a shadow over all of our efforts, and no doubt it concerns people not just numbers.

The massive economic downturn we are witnessing is dramatically changing the political landscape, thus presenting a security concern all in itself. In the wider European region alone, just a few weeks ago, the gas crisis reminded us of the vulnerability of our energy supplies.

The after effects of the Georgia conflict last August have not given way to long-term stability.

In Kosovo, the year that has passed since its unilateral declaration of independence has brought us no closer to a consensus of its status.

In Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh, longstanding, protracted conflicts continue to defy resolution.

One thing is clear, in our multipolar world security depends on more than just power. It depends on building relationship and forging ties. It depends on building bridges over troubled waters.

Global problems require global solutions. The need for global governance, the need for collective action and an international order based on common rules has never been greater.

We in Greece have developed through the ages the art of building bridges. Therefore, I'm proud to say that over the years Greece has forged strong ties and built solid relationships with people close and afar that have withstood the test of time.

Greece is present in the efforts made by the international community for peace and security in

regions as far apart as Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia, Western Sahara, Abkhazia, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan.

In the Persian Gulf and in the Mediterranean, Greece helps combat international terrorism.

In Somalia, we are assisting in the combat of piracy.

In the Middle East, we have been active amongst others in assisting the women of the region on their road to empowerment.

And, in Afghanistan, our force there is assisting in the reconstruction of the country.

With this in mind, I would like to describe three bridges we see as very significant: First, of course, the bridge over the Atlantic that brings Europe and the U.S. together. Second, the bridge across Eurasia that brings Russia closer to the U.S. and Europe. Third, the bridge over the European heartlands that brings the Balkans to the European family.

Ladies and gentlemen, the first and most obvious bridge is the one, of course, across the Atlantic, the bedrock of our post-war system. Europe and the U.S. have a long history of interdependence as global partners with global responsibilities. As Vice President Biden said at the Munich Security Conference earlier this month, in sharing ideas and searching for partners in a more complex world, Americans and Europeans still look to one another before they look to anyone else.

Now there is a saying that says that great winds blow upon high hills. The European Union has guaranteed peace and prosperity for its 27 members, but we must not forget that our era asks for greater engagement with the rest of the world.

I strongly believe that the U.S. would benefit from a strong Europe that stands as an equal and solid partner. Now is the opportunity to do so with a new administration that has generated such popularity and enthusiasm around the world.

Now it's the time to think of ways to further deepen this relationship including, but by no means limiting it to, the NATO framework. We need to formulate the most expedient power-sharing possible with each side, undertaking the responsibilities it is most fit to bear. In this context, European soft power is a desired corollary to U.S. military might. Still, Europe must develop, as it has already started to do slowly, its own military capability which is crucial particularly in regions where only Europe is an acceptable mediator by all.

To be totally candid, however, there are certain issues that the European Union must resolve in order to keep our side of the bargain. We have shown leadership in the crisis in Georgia, but we still have some way to go. The latest news from Ireland is encouraging, and I'm optimistic that once the Lisbon Treaty is cleared Europe will come closer to finding its common voice. Henry Kissinger may never get the one phone number to dial he asked for, but the U.S. will have a reliable partner.

Ladies and gentlemen, the second bridge is the one we can build across Eurasia to Russia. As you probably know, in January, 2009, Greece has assumed the chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

There are several challenges in Europe that bring to light the real potential of the OSCE particularly when it comes to crisis management. The Georgia conflict showed that a crisis in the wider European region is not a distant possibility. The fact is that the OSCE, with 56 participating states and 11 partners for cooperation, remains a critical part of international efforts in order to establish security and stability from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

Only last week, after extensive consultations, the 56 participating states agreed to extend until the 30th of June the presence of the Organization's military monitoring offices in Georgia. And, in January, following the OSCE's active mediation, the Georgian government repaired the pipeline and authorized the delivery of natural gas to

the areas of South Ossetia after extensive consultation with my special representative. The situation on the ground requires our presence.

Lately, there has been a lot of talk about the prospects of a dialogue on European security. Many are skeptical of the set of ideas put forward by President Medvedev and President Sarkozy, but few would question the need for joint cooperation in order to enhance and further strengthen security in the wider European region.

The need to press the reset button with respect to Euro-Atlantic and, in particular, U.S.-Russian relations has been widely acknowledged. At this point, there are more questions than answers as to what this means practically, but we can all agree that the wide-ranging dialogue on security held in good faith and with a view to find common ground is long overdue.

Global challenges demand that we engage with each other in a more holistic approach on hard security questions such as arms control and soft

security challenges such as climate change, illegal immigration and human trafficking. That need for global cooperation is more pressing than ever before. In this effort, for a new concept of European security, three main guidelines should be applied.

The first is modesty. We have come a long way since the Cold War. Walls have been torn down. Families reunited. But the job is not done. Some European states feel that we have still to overcome all the dividing lines in Europe. If we want to be honest with ourselves, we must admit that we can do more to foster indivisible security through the Euro-Atlantic region.

A second guideline is consolidation. Even as we explore new paths, our point of departure must be what we have already achieved. The area is rich in experience and with organizations mandated to develop common security. The OSCE has a special place in this architecture. As we consider new initiatives, let us build on the ground that has been cleared already.

The third guideline should be to make haste slowly. We should take the time required to prepare a positive agenda, to consider all options, to consult as extensively as possible. When the heads of state and government of the Conference for Security and Co-operation met in Helsinki in 1975, the participating states had held more than 2,400 meetings in Geneva and deliberated more than 4,660 proposals. So, if one aims for Helsinki plus, let us not forget the careful work this will require.

In the meantime and as our discussions unfold, we must not waste any time and move forward with the toolbox we already have in our hands. On the one hand, we should support the reactivation of a NATO-Russia Council so that it reaches its full potential as soon as possible.

On the other hand, we must boost the European Union's Neighbourhood Policy and our Eastern partnership. In this regard, we welcome the initiative of the Czech European Union Presidency.

And, of course, we need to intensify our efforts to deal with the so-called frozen conflicts which we know can turn hot very quickly.

The third and final bridge, ladies and gentlemen, is the one that leads the Balkans to Brussels. Let me be as clear as I can. For us, there is no doubt that the only way forward is full membership in the European Union and NATO for the whole of Southeastern Europe. Greece, as the oldest European Union and NATO member in the region, feels the heightened responsibility to assist its neighbors on the road to progress through the necessary change and reform.

Although we have come a long way since the nineties, the region still remains a work in progress. We in Athens are quite concerned about developments in three areas:

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, 14 years after the Dayton Accords, much remains to be done especially when it comes to streamlining decision-making. A change in the mindsets, the active participation of

all its citizens and a certain degree of political consensus is needed. After some slow progress in 2008, 2009 is a crucial year in the European integration of the country in order to match this of its neighbors.

It is significant that the countless prophecies of doom have never materialized. As it is equally significant that the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, irrespective of religious and ethnic background, are looking forward to the Euro-Atlantic future for their region. Yet, the state remains extremely fragile, and the international community must reengage.

Turning to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in the past couple of years, a number of warning signals have been coming from Skopje. The government of Nikola Gruevski appears to have chosen the road of nationalism, awakening Balkan ghosts. The forthcoming presidential elections this March will be another key test particularly since last June's

parliamentary elections were marred with violence and voting irregularities.

As you probably know, Greece has been in negotiations under the auspices of the U.N. for years with FYROM over its name. Despite our good will and our sincere efforts, these negotiations have not been successful so far. We hope that the government in Skopje will meet us halfway and agree to a win-win solution.

Last but not least, Turkey. I think many of us agree that Turkey's accession to the European Union is key. Greece is very much in support and has proved it over the years. Our support for Turkey is naturally offered under the same rules and principles which apply to each and every European Union candidate. This is the same process for everyone, the one, for example, Greece went through. Hence, our support cannot be unconditional. It relies upon Turkey honoring her commitments and promises.

Turkey has taken certain steps forward in the reform process. We were all happy to note that

there was some progress with the amendment of infamous Article 301 of the Penal Code. This was long overdue.

But much remains to be done, however. Overall progress is assessed by the European Union as quite modest. A number of outstanding issues remain to be addressed. These issues concern, among others, the consolidation of the democratic system as well as the respect of minority rights and the freedom of religion and the freedom of expression. In the same spirit, good neighborly relations and adherence to the international law are also of capital importance.

No doubt, Turkey has a long and winding road ahead. Nevertheless, it is clear that it is a road well worth traveling because it would benefit both Turkey and Europe.

Linked with Turkey's prospects for accession to the European Union is its continued occupation of Cyprus. A just, lasting and functional solution for the reunification of the island after 35 years of Turkish occupation is long overdue. In 2008, we

welcomed the beginning of a new effort within the U.N. framework with direct talks between the two sides. We hope that this new effort will achieve an agreed settlement which will, at last, reunify the island and allow the two communities to live side by side and prosper.

To conclude, ladies and gentlemen, we are part of a world that is changing and demands that we change with it. Building bridges is best done on the foundations of what we have worked so hard to achieve over the past decades, and moving forward with the tools at hand while we develop new ones will keep us from wasting time and save us from watering down hard-won agreements and standards.

Greece stands ready to facilitate this process in any format, at any level our partners deems appropriate. U.S. vision and leadership are essential to our common endeavor. After all, as Aristotle said: "You will never do anything in this world without courage. It is the greatest quality of the mind next to honor."

Thank you very much.

(Applause)

MR. PIFER: Madam Minister, first, let me thank you for a speech that really captured, I think, the full sweep of issues that we face when we're talking about the broad question of European security and some of the challenges that you're going to face as the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE.

I'd like to start off with one question and go to the second bridge you described, this bridge between Europe and Russia, and, as you mentioned, the opportunity to perhaps reset relations between the West and Russia, building on what the Vice President said in Munich. And I'd like to come back to the question of the proposal that President Medvedev made for a European or a Euro-Atlantic Security Conference because he has seemed to be now including this side of the Atlantic.

And my question would be if you look at the current situation, you could argue that one of the reasons that institutions that could be making a major

contribution to European security aren't working as well as they might, for example, the OSCE, has been because of some of the positions that the Russians have taken within that institution.

So how do you approach, and I wonder if I could tease out from you a bit more comment on how we should react, how the West should react to this somewhat amorphous proposal by the Russians in a way that protects existing institutions but still might entice them into a more cooperative frame which would be useful to all of us.

MINISTER BAKOYANNIS: Well, this is a very difficult question.

MR. PIFER: I'm sorry.

MINISTER BAKOYANNIS: It was the first time it was raised and openly discussed was under the Finnish Chair in the Ministers of Foreign Affairs level at a lunch. These lunches are sometimes very good ideas, first of all, because the ministers speak freely. There are no note takers. There is nothing

extremely official. So people speak out and say what they are really thinking.

So what came out of this lunch was no agreement, but there was a sense that most of our European colleagues agreed that we Europeans are quite happy with what we have, which means NATO with the security system with which we have been. But still, we understand that there is a need for a dialogue which would also engage more Russia and her concerns and her difficulties and her ways of looking at things.

Are we close to an agreement on an OSCE level of what kind of dialogue and what the context of the dialogue will be? The answer is no. We are working on it, and it will take, as I said, time.

It will take time to, first of all, agree what this context will be. The Russians are more interested in hard security issues. The Europeans are more interested in bringing in soft security issues, which means that both have to be discussed.

Our permanent representatives are working on some ideas now, and what the Greek Chair said is that

we are open to start this dialogue on any level which is needed, which means special representatives, high officials, ministerial which might the case if we feel that we are close enough to start the dialogue.

We are not looking to finish it. I want to be very clear about it. We want the context to be clear of what we will be discussing and how we will be discussing it.

So I think that it depends a lot, of course, what the new administration will want and how much the Russians will honestly want to make this dialogue happen.

MR. PIFER: Thank you.

Let me open the floor for questions with a request: Please identify yourself. Also, please wait for the microphone so that our colleagues in the overflow room can hear and if you could keep the questions short and try to have a question mark at the end.

QUESTIONER: My name is Vedren Adronovsky, Voice of America, Macedonia Service.

Madam Minister, recently, the government of Greece has been suggesting that it is ready to accept the solution to the name issue with the Republic of Macedonia based on a geographic description, Republic of Northern Macedonia, for instance. Are you ready at the same time to recognize the Macedonian people, Macedonian language and Macedonian culture, identity in the Republic of Macedonia as Macedonian or you will insist on additionally renaming those?

Thank you very much.

MINISTER BAKOYANNIS: Nobody wants to rename anybody.

Let me make it very clear. Macedonia is a great geographic region: 51 percent of Macedonia belongs to Greece, 38 percent belongs to Bulgaria, I don't know exactly, 27 I think, to FYROM and 1 percent to Albania.

This is a region which has in the past had a lot of problems. For the stability of this region, it is very important that the problems of the past are

buried and forgotten and not brought up in the years to come.

So what we said is very clear. We have 2.5 million proud Macedonians in Greece. In Bulgaria, there are people who call themselves Macedonians.

So let's make it clear that what we are talking about is the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with an adjective in front of the name, Macedonia, which makes it clear that we are not talking about the whole, and the people who live there belong to this country, and this is a country Greece wants to have the best possible relations. This is a friendly country for us. We are the first investors in FYROM. We have produced 25,000 jobs in FYROM. We still want to have the Hellenic Aid Program in FYROM.

And I must honestly say that I was very much disappointed when Corridor 10, when I myself went to the Greek Parliament to pledge 50 million euros for this corridor which is extremely important for this country because it's the biggest street going through FYROM, when, instead of having a good cooperation, the

only thing which Prime Minister Gruevski thought of is name a corridor with the name Alexander the Great the Macedonian when he knew exactly what the reaction would be.

So what I'm saying is very clear. We have a difficult past in the Balkans. If we want to be successful, we have to look into the future for the future of the people, to the future and prosperity of the people, and this comes hand in hand with a good neighborly relationship.

So Greece is ready. I hope that at one moment a government in Skopje will be ready too.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. My name is Andrew Sirgensky. I'm a correspondent with ITAR-TASS News Agency of Russia.

Madam Minister, the first question very briefly, and you mentioned it in your remarks, do you support the idea of President Medvedev to build a new security architecture in Europe?

And the second very briefly also, what are the perspectives for the future OSCE mission presence

in Georgia? Is it going to be two missions, one in Georgia, another one in South Ossetia, or it's going to be just one mission?

Thank you.

MINISTER BAKOYANNIS: I think I was very clear in saying that we support the dialogue on the new European security. We believe that, and I think this is more or less what most of my European colleagues believe and what we are looking for is the format of this dialogue, which for the moment we don't have an agreement there. But everybody agrees that we have to engage more and talk more about these issues.

Now on your second question, this is a very, very difficult question, and I want to be very clear. The OSCE mission in Georgia has to stay there. It is extremely important. It's one of the biggest missions the OSCE has, and it can be of help for everybody.

We are starting in the OSCE with two completely different starting points. Russia has recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The rest of

the countries have not recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the full territorial integrity of Georgia.

If we want to find a way to agree, we have to find a diplomatic solution which will not touch on that basic question but which will only find a way to keep the mission in the region. So this is the Chair's position.

We have some proposals on the table. The decision of the OSCE cannot be, how do you say, an argument for one or the other side. It cannot be an indirect positioning of one or the other side. It must be purely a technical decision which allows the OSCE mission to stay in place and do the work they are supposed to do, and, in my opinion, they are doing it well.

QUESTIONER: Chao Chen, freelancer.

Madam Minister, thank you for your coming.

When you go and meet Secretary Clinton, what would you say to her about two things: first, what Greece can do in helping improve the relation between the U.S. and Russia and, second, what kind of

cooperation Greece and the U.S.A. can have in dealing with the world financial crisis?

Thank you.

MINISTER BAKOYANNIS: Well, I think I said enough already. You know when Greece took the responsibility of the Chair we didn't make any big promises. We just said that we would be honest brokers and try to be helpful with the problems which the OSCE faces, and they are many.

Secondly, I don't think anybody needs Greece to improve the relations between the U.S. and Russia. It is a decision which is, as far as I understood, very clearly stated by both governments. So we are just supporting all good ideas towards bringing countries closer together.

Third, on your second question, the financial crisis is the number one problem of all the countries in the world today. And let me just state openly my personal opinion. There is a danger with this financial crisis, that countries become introverted, that they close up, that they try in a

way to deal with the financial crisis on a local, every time, level.

My belief and very strong belief is that this is a very big danger, that today more than ever we need more cooperation. We need more opening up. We need more interaction between the countries.

For us in the European Union, it was very clear. We went through the phase where one had the feeling that it was a great danger for the European Union that the countries would only respond to the financial crisis at their own national level, and I'm happy to say that we went through this phase and that now we work closer together, all the European Union countries, to face the crisis.

But it's not only a question for the European Union. This is a global problem, and it needs global cooperation. I hope that the meeting of the G-20 will send this message as strong as it is needed.

MR. PIFER: Let me follow that up if I could, which is if you look at the global financial crisis

now, it's really the number one item on any country's agenda. Now you have a special task in your role in the OSCE. How do you ensure or how do you fight so that in London and Berlin, Paris, Moscow and here in Washington you can get the leadership to focus on the issues that are germane to the OSCE organization, because this financial crisis has this tendency really to suck all of the oxygen out of the room?

MINISTER BAKOYANNIS: You are absolutely right. It's not only on the OSCE question. It will be, and I think I talked a bit about it earlier. It will be one of the main questions about, for example, development aid programs. It will be one of the main questions on policies, neighborhood policy, for example, for the European Union or policies towards Africa.

The first reaction which you will get as a poor foreign minister from any economic minister is a very bad, negative reaction. But it is extremely important, I think, that our governments, from the smallest to the biggest, understand that this is

completely and clearly related to the economic and financial crisis.

If we would give up now either on the investments of technology for climate change or if we would back up because it would be too expensive on the development policies in Africa or if we would stop as the European Union, for example, the close cooperation in the Mediterranean Union which we need and we started but it also needs money, this would backfire directly. Then we would have to deal with the problems, and then they would be even more expensive.

So it is an argument which is made. We have to make it. I strongly hope for the support, for example, of everybody here in this room for the need not to back up now in front of the financial crisis and lose the gains because we will lose it if we don't see in the future.

QUESTIONER: Madam Foreign Minister, this is Jacques Madi from the Syrian TV and Radio.

The European peace is dependent to a good extent on a peaceful Middle East, and the role of

Turkey has been very much appreciated recently, in Turkey playing that role. The Middle Eastern countries and Syria, one of them, is looking forward also to having a country like yours who has a great understanding of the area to play also another role in bringing peace to the area, especially now after the hawkish Israeli government is promising more radicalism in the Middle East.

Do you see Greece playing a more active role in bringing peace to the Middle East within the European Union and with the United States?

MINISTER BAKOYANNIS: Well, let me say that, yes, Greece already plays a role. We are one of the countries who feel very close to the whole of the Middle East. We have extremely good relationship with all our Arab friends and very good relationship with Israel. Without having any Greek geopolitical interests in the region, we can really be, as I said before, honest brokers and try to be as helpful as possible.

Now we are not the country which will solve the Middle East crisis, but we are a country who very openly stated already three years ago that we have to find a comprehensive solution of the Middle East crisis.

This is not only Israeli or Palestinian questions which have to be solved. I know somebody might argue that one should start piece by piece. I'm afraid we don't have this luxury in the Middle East. We have to see the whole picture and try to work with all the players in the region.

We have tried as the Greek government to make this kind of policies which will bring the peoples together and which will elevate the peoples to peoples context. So we are working with the women. We are having the Next Generation Initiative. We brought together children.

Excuse me, the gentleman. But we invited girls, 15-year-old girls from Palestine and from Israel, and it was a wonderful experience, ladies and gentlemen. There were 15-year-old girls for 5 days on

a ship together, from Israel and from Palestine, going through Greece. It was one of the most interesting experiences I saw.

These young girls, which will be the mothers of the soldiers of tomorrow, understood that whatever -- one girl said it very clearly. She said: We are on one boat, and if it sinks, we will all sink. And if it goes to a harbor, we will get to this harbor.

And it was the strongest and simplest message which could be given, and she was not more than 14 or 15 years old.

So it will take time. It will take effort. But I'm happy to see that the new administration will not leave it for the end of the administration but will start working on it at once. We cannot lose any more time in the Middle East.

QUESTIONER: Hello. My name is Metodija Koloski. I serve as the President of United Macedonian Diaspora.

So, pardon my voice. I'm under the weather a little bit. But, hello, Minister.

MINISTER BAKOYANNIS: Oh, me too. Don't worry.

QUESTIONER: It is always a pleasure to see you and thank you for your remarks.

I would like to congratulate Greece on assuming the OSCE chairmanship, and the United Macedonian Diaspora looks forward to working with Greece on many issues that plague Europe such as minority rights, conflict mediation, post-conflict rehabilitation, democratization and human rights.

You stated that Turkey must respect minority rights, freedom of religion and freedom of expression. According to a report last week by the council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, the Commissioner remains concerned by Greek authorities' refusal to recognize the existence of any other minority except Muslims. What prevents Greek authorities from showing greater receptivity to diversity and allowing members of the Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Roma and Vlach minority groups to identify as such and to express their identities?

And, when does Greece plan to ratify the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the European Convention on Nationality and the Fourth Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights?

And, when will the Macedonian, Turkish, Albanian, Vlach and Roma minorities be granted full minority rights, freedom of religion and recognition by the government of Greece?

Thank you.

MINISTER BAKOYANNIS: Every European citizen, which means that every Greek citizen has all the rights you just mentioned. This is the wonderful thing about Europe, that in the European Union all citizens have the freedom of religion and of all human rights, and these are assured.

Why does Greece recognize only a Muslim minority? This is very simple, because Greece has signed the so-called Lisbon Treaty. The Lisbon Treaty was signed with Turkey at a very difficult moment.

The Lausanne Treaty, excuse me. The Lausanne Treaty. So the Lausanne Treaty was signed with Turkey, and at the time the minority which was recognized by the Lausanne Treaty was the Muslim minority and the Christian minority in Turkey. So there is a very clear historical reason why the Muslim minority is called Muslim minority, and it is a very important treaty between Turkey and Greece, and Greece keeps this treaty very carefully because it still is valid and is very important in our relations with Turkey.

So there is another way of which I know that they are a Muslim minority. For example is the Pomaks in the Muslim minority. They have Turkish origin, and there are also Romas in our Muslim minority. But we use the word, Muslim minority, due to this Lausanne Treaty which was signed and which makes the relations with Greece and Turkey solid.

QUESTIONER: Lambuse Le Pondaneux, Greek correspondent.

Ms. Bakoyannis, how do you assess the relationship between the United States and Greece?

MINISTER BAKOYANNIS: Well, the relationship between the United States and Greece is very good. As you know, Greece and the United States have a longstanding excellent relationship and a very strong bridge which is the Greek Americans who live in the United States and prosper in the United States. So between the United States and Greece, there are no open questions.

I think there is only one bilateral question which we would like to see, as soon as possible, solved, and this is the visa waiver program.

QUESTIONER: Hello. My name is Stefanie Maridas.

I want to thank you for being here today.

In terms of the foreign perception of Greece after the riots in December, how do you see that?

Today, for example, in the *New York Times*, there was an article with a quote from a political analyst that law and order are starting to crumble in

Greece. How do you see the foreign perceptions of Greece?

MINISTER BAKOYANNIS: Well, I will tell you, yes, we had a difficult moment in December. It was a tragic thing which happened, a 15-year-old boy killed by a policeman. This brings in all European countries there are children on the streets, and in Greece it was very clearly the case. So we had anger, young students who were very angry about that.

Allow me to say, everybody understands it.

And on the other side, this was coupled also with an anger which came from a lot of frustration and pressure which this generation has preparing for the universities. The Greek educational system is quite tough, and I would say that it is also extremely demanding with the exams which they have to take to be able to go into the universities.

The government decided to open this chapter, and we are now in the dialogue. The Minister of Education is in a very big dialogue with all parts of

Greek society, parties but also the responsible persons, to see if there are changes are needed.

My personal opinion is that there are changes needed. I'm not allowed to say that because I'm the Foreign Minister. But anyway, I think this was one of the reasons.

Now what the article in the *New York Times* today, I think the analyst has his own opinion, of course, but he might be a bit biased. I don't think that the situation in Greece is bad.

Yes, we are facing problems. Yes, as all European societies, we are trying to deal with the financial crisis, which is not easy. Yes, there were tough moments.

But Greece is a stable European democracy. Greece is a democracy which has proved in the years which have gone through since 1974, that we have been always moving forward. Greece is one of the four economies in the European Union where a positive GDP is foreseen, even a small growth but still a growth. Greece has a solid banking system which did

not face the problems which other countries face due to toxic investments.

We hope that our tourist market will still be okay. We count that we might have losses, but I still believe based on the interest which has shown that the Europeans and the other guests will not lose this one very precious week in the year. So we will fight our way through with our problems, but I'm optimistic that we are over the mountain.

There is an expression. I don't know how they say it in English. But we are over the biggest of the problems.

QUESTIONER: Madam Minister, my name is Charles Andre. I'm actually an investor in your country and on the Island of Crete, Cavo Sidero, and your government has been very supportive of our engagement with that development. But I want to return to your comments on the financial crisis and the impact it will have on the openness of not only Greece but in your broader role of Europe.

First and foremost, because I have a vested interest and concern in openness in Greece, will your government continue to project an openness towards investment and support of investors like myself and other Americans and other westerners who are seeking to be engaged in helping to create jobs by investment on infrastructure and other deployable assets?

And, secondly, where do you see Europe going in terms of your concerns about closing in, closing out, looking inwardly, not looking outwardly?

MINISTER BAKOYANNIS: Well, as I say, on behalf of my government, I can absolutely assure you that we will try even harder to invite investment, to protect investments and to encourage people to come to invest to Greece. If we did it one way until now, we will double our efforts now when it's extremely important because investments create jobs, and this is the number one concern of everybody today. So you can count on the Greek government to help you as much as possible with your investments.

Now the second, your second question, it's not so much related to Greece. I mean Greece is not the biggest economy in the European Union. We have a small percentage of the European economy. My comments are more for the bigger countries in the European Union, and it is important that they follow this policy.

We, of course, will do it. We will do it, for example, for our neighborhood where Greece is a leader. We will do it for the Balkans. We didn't stop the investment, our investment in the Balkans. We didn't even stop the Hellenic Aid Program in the Balkans which is to help investors in our neighboring countries invest in small businesses, et cetera.

So we will do our part. But it is, of course, the other, the big European countries which I think will give also the tone and which will send also the right messages to our neighbors in the East where, as you know, some of the problems have grown lately quite a lot.

But, to close, I am just saying solidarity is needed in the European Union. It's needed in the world. So, it's more cooperation, more solidarity if we want all of us to come out of this problem together because I don't see any other way out.

QUESTIONER: Madam Minister, one more question on the name issue. Vedren Adronovsky, Voice of America, Macedonia.

Could you confirm or deny press reports that during a recent speech at the Constantinos Karamanlis Institute for Democracy in Athens you stated that the decision to veto Macedonia's admission to NATO was taken a year prior to the summit? If true, what were Greece's goals in the name negotiations during that period?

Thank you.

MINISTER BAKOYANNIS: You didn't read my speech.

I said that the position of Greece on the Skopjain issue was decided one year ago, yes, because the Greek government went to parliament directly after

the elections which was in September and changed a policy of 17 years.

For 17 years, it was, as you know, the Greek official position that the name of your country could not contain the name, Macedonia, in it, and then this position was changed. And I went to parliament on behalf of the Greek government and said that we want to have a name with a geographical objective which makes it clear about what part of Macedonia we are speaking, which will be used by everybody. That's what I stated in the Constantinos Karamanlis Foundation.

MR. PIFER: Okay. Well, maybe I will close on one last question, getting back to this financial tsunami.

In less than five weeks, we will have the G-20 summit in London or I guess it's the G-22, 23, maybe 24 now. The question I would ask is when there will be a number of European Union states there will there be a common European Union position, and, if not, how do those E.U. members who aren't going to be in

London, how confident can they be that their views, concerns are going to be taken into account by the members that are present?

MINISTER BAKOYANNIS: Yes, we manage that. We have an extra meeting on the first of March of all the European 27 on a prime minister/presidential level which is on the European Council level. The decision will be made there for the European Union which will be represented by the countries who will be part of the G-20.

This is an important step forward for the European Union. Now I have been doing the work of the Minister of Foreign Affairs for three years now. In these three years, one could see that there has been real progress in the European Union. There have been also setbacks when the Irish did not vote in the referendum. But it is an ongoing process which shows that in the European Union the countries understand more and more that we need more Europe and more united Europe. So this meeting before the G-20 shows that at least this message is clear.

MR. PIFER: Okay. Well, Madam Minister, I think we have one last question in the back here.

QUESTIONER: Thank you, Madam Minister, for your remarks. Mohar from the Embassy of Georgia.

First, let me express our gratitude for your personal engagement, the prolongation of the observation mission of OSCE to my country, to Georgia.

I have a question back to bridges with the Russian Federation. In your remarks, you mentioned the importance of renewal of the work under the framework of NATO-Russia Council. I would remind the society that this work was suspended according to the decision of NATO countries after the occupation of Russian troops of Georgia. So could you tell what changed after this fact and why NATO should change their position toward the work under this NRC?

As well, could you comment on the statement of the representative of Russia to NATO, Mr. Rogozin, who stated that attempt to resume NRC work from NATO means some kind of excuse from NATO countries on their position toward Russia?

Thank you.

MINISTER BAKOYANNIS: Well, I'm not sure I completely understood your question, but let me just restate my position.

First of all, you're speaking now to the OSCE Chair which means that I'm representing all 56 countries. So our position is clear both on the mission and on the need for the mission in Georgia to stay.

And on the Russian-NATO Council, I just said what is the will of the European Union and what's my personal position, that we have to reengage in this dialogue with Russia.

And the problem which occurred also, I don't want to diminish the problems which Georgia faces or other countries face. The question is how do we deal with these problems?

In my point of view, there is no other way than engagement, dialogue, negotiations so that we find a solution. We want the Geneva talks to go on. We want the Geneva talks to, if possible, be

successful. There is, in my way of thinking, no other way than engagement and then dialogue.

MR. PIFER: Madam Minister, you've covered a broad range of subjects. I would like to thank you very much for joining us today here at Brookings and also wish you success in your meetings with the U.S. government over the next two days.

MINISTER BAKOYANNIS: Thank you very much.

(Applause)

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Expires: November 30, 2012

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