



# Friendship Greater Than Diplomacy

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It would have it that at the time of the first intergovernmental conference, which formally launched negotiations on Serbia's accession to the European Union, Greece happened to be holding the presidency of the Union. This country, traditionally a great friend of Serbia, has always provided unconditional support for Serbia's EU integration and the Greek presidency carries with it a nice symbolism. Bilateral relations between Greece and Serbia are based on a solid foundation established within the historical links between the two neighbouring countries, which have over the centuries shared a common struggle and suffered similar experiences and fates. Perhaps best testifying to the strength and friendliness of cooperation between our two countries is the fact that during the September meeting of Serbian Prime Minister Ivica Dačić and Greek Prime Minister Adonis Samaras it was agreed that in the second half of 2014 the governments of

Serbia and Greece would meet and that such meetings would become regular, alternately hosted by one of the two countries.

■ **During a recent visit to Serbia by Greek Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Evangelos Vanizelos the close relationship between the two countries was confirmed. Where do you see room for intensifying cooperation between Greece and Serbia?**

- Relations between Serbia and Greece are very well developed, but the scope for strengthening them still exists. We expect

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that in the period ahead there will be further intensification of cooperation in the field of European integration. I would particularly emphasise the interest of Serbia to strengthen economic cooperation with Greece through the strengthening of trade and attracting potential Greek investors. There is also scope for enhancing cooperation in the fields of culture and science.

■ **Greece is presiding over the EU Council of Ministers for the next five months and Mr Vanizelos offered Greek support for Serbia's EU accession. Was this confirmed with tangible forms of cooperation?**

- From the very beginning of the process Greece has strongly supported Serbia's European integration. This support was made more tangible in 2010 with the signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation between the two foreign ministries to accelerate Serbia's EU integration process, on the basis of which several rounds of consultations have already been held.

We discussed with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Venizelos the need to further intensify cooperation through the provision of technical assistance in European integration, in which Greece has great experience. I must point out in particular our great pleasure that the first inter-governmental conference between Serbia and the EU, which formally marked the commencement of negotiations on Serbia's EU membership, was held precisely during the Greek presidency. We highly appreciate Greece's initiative to hold a ministerial conference between the EU and the countries of the Western Balkans in Thessaloniki during its presidency, in May, which would reaffirm the EU's enlargement policy and the Thessaloniki Agenda of 2003.

■ **Serbian-Greek diplomatic relations were formalised back in 1880. How would you rate these relations today?**

- Relations with Greece are traditionally good and friendly. Political dialogue is intensive at all levels, as can be concluded by the number of visits made in both directions. Besides the visit of the Greek Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, in the last year and a half alone we have exchanged presidential visits and the Prime Minister and First Deputy Prime Minister of Serbia have visited Greece. We also expect a joint session of the governments of Serbia and Greece to be held this year.

I would like to emphasise that we are extremely appreciative and expect that Greece will maintain its principled position regarding the issue of preserving the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Serbia, as well as supporting the most important foreign policy goal of the Republic of Serbia - full membership in the European Union.

■ **In which areas is Serbian-Greek bilateral cooperation most dynamic?**

- Cooperation with Greece is very well developed in many areas. Greek companies are among the largest investors in Serbia and are present in the areas of banking, energy, real estate, hospitality and others. Despite the economic crisis, economic cooperation is constantly continuing to develop successfully. Greece is present in Serbia through the projects of the Greek Plan for the Economic Reconstruction of the Balkans – HiPERB, which is continuing to be implemented, with some modifications. We view with optimism the upcoming period in which the gradual improvement of the economic situation in both countries is expected, which will open up new opportunities.



**EVANGELOS VENIZELOS, GREEK DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND ALEKSANDAR VUČIĆ, SERBIAN DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER**

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Tourism is another area where we see room for strengthening cooperation. We believe that Serbia can and should be present through its tourist offer on the Greek market.

Cooperation in the field of defence is good, developed and diversified, especially when it comes to staff training and education. So far some 80 Serbian officers have studied in Greece, while the modalities of joint involvement in multinational operations are being considered, as is the promoting of cooperation between centres for peace operations.

In the field of culture there are visible results, for example the reconstruction of Nebojša Tower, the memorial centre to Riga od Fere. Greece takes care of the protection of Serbian cultural and historical monuments on its territory (Hilandar Monastery, Serbian houses, the mausoleum and monuments at Vido on Corfu and

the Zejtinlik Cemetery in Thessaloniki), while on the territory of Serbia there is a Greek military cemetery in Pirot. In addition to the aforementioned, there is also regular communication at fairs of books, tourism and others and through a series of cultural and other events in both countries.

Ties between the two countries are being realised to achieve more at the local level, through the twinning of municipalities, economic cooperation, exchange of experiences and others.

■ **Has the recent Greek crisis reflected in any way on its cooperation with Serbia in different areas?**

- As can be seen from the answer to your previous question, the Greek crisis has not had a major impact on cooperation with Serbia. In some areas it is even more intense than in the years preceding the crisis. The economic crisis has not had a significant impact even when it comes to the presence of Greek businesses on the Serbian market. All of the most important companies are still in Serbia and normal business and trade volume in 2013 is up by about 10% compared to the previous year. Only the volume of FDI from Greece to Serbia has decreased in recent years, but the impression is that this is primarily part of a global trend as opposed to a trend of local character.

■ **Will Serbia and Greece jointly mark the centennial of the beginning of World War I this year or that of the Thessaloniki Front in 2016?**

- The creation of a programme marking the beginning of World War I in 2014 is in its final stages. It is planned that in the framework of this anniversary, in cooperation with Greece, historical events that connect the two countries, like the Thessaloniki Front, will be specially commemorated.

■ **A large number of Greek students are studying in Serbia, especially studies in the health field. In what other ways do Serbia and Greece cooperate**

**in the fields of science and education?**

- In the previous period the exchange of scholarships for undergraduate and postgraduate studies and training was important for both parties in the field of education, as well as summer courses for the Serbian, Greek and ancient Greek languages. Belgrade University works closely with the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Cooperation is also achieved in the context of regional academic associations, such as the Black Sea University Network.



**Scientific and technical cooperation is conducted under the auspices of European Union projects and is expected to continue within the EU's "Horizon 2020" programme for science and innovation**

When it comes to scientific and technical cooperation with Greece, there is great interest among researchers from both countries. Scientific and technical cooperation is conducted under the auspices of European Union projects and is expected to continue within the EU's "Horizon 2020" programme for science and innovation.

■ **When it comes to citizens of Serbian origin in Greece, is the Serbian Foreign Ministry in communication with them and, if so, how?**

- Communication with the Serbian diaspora in Greece is regular and conducted at multiple levels. Almost daily connection between our ministry and the Serbian community takes place, mainly through our embassy in Athens and the Consulate General in Thessaloniki, as well as during the visits of

representatives of the Office for Cooperation with the Diaspora and Serbs in the region and other institutions. The Serbian diaspora in Greece is well organised and integrated into Greek society.

It is estimated that there are around seven thousand Serbian citizens in Greece. Most of them are in Athens, Thessaloniki and the surrounding area, as well as on Crete and the Peloponnese. Our citizens are most commonly employed in the hospitality industry, agriculture and construction. A number of our athletes and sporting officials are resident in Greece, as well as our students. ■