

A Total Balkan Approach

by George A. Papandreou

In this era of dramatic change for Southeastern Europe, Greece is pursuing a foreign policy aimed at creating greater regional stability, democracy, and development. This policy is based on a simple but profound truth: that the interests and well-being of the people in our region are aligned with the principles and policies of Greece.

Our goal was and is to safeguard our national interests in such a way that we contribute to the solution of regional problems. We have taken advantage of our dual identity as a full member of the democratic institutions of the West and a country bound by geography and history to the Balkans. As the only full member of the European Union (EU) and NATO in the region, we feel a responsibility to represent the interests of our neighbors in these institutions and to help them prepare for integration into the European framework.

Greece has a dual identity: as a full member of the democratic institutions of the West and as a country bound by geography and history to the Balkans.

As a result, Greece is now seen as a model for other Balkan countries. It is a country that has succeeded in transforming itself, building on the principles of its tradition while assimilating new ideas. Greece has opened up the prospect of a European Balkans. We want to give the Balkans a credible voice. We want to establish a broad consensus regarding the future of our peoples, by initiating a dialogue of equals throughout the Balkan peninsula. Ultimately, we want to realize the vision of the Greek freedom fighter Rigas Pheraios: united through common interests and democratic values, the Balkan people can determine their own future.

Greece plays a leading role in the political and economic reconstruction of the Balkans. This role has been officially recognized with the designation of the northern port city of Thessaloniki as headquarters of both the Agency for the Reconstruction of South East Europe and the Balkan Stability Pact. Many countries—including the United States, the Czech Republic, Italy, Russia, Turkey, France, Great Britain, Germany, and Canada—have sought bilateral cooperation with Greece to implement other Balkan initiatives.

Regional leadership creates an advantage but also new responsibilities for our

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country. Hellenism is being called upon to define a new vision for the Balkan region—a new vision of peace and democracy for a region that has suffered so much through incessant wars.

Faced with this challenge, Greece has created a comprehensive regional strategy, what I term a Total Balkan Approach: a regional approach to democracy, security, and prosperity. Our objectives are to control potential sources of conflict and to create the prerequisites for political and financial development. Our ultimate goal is regional integration into European institutions. This strategy is founded upon the principles of respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, respect of existing borders, and dissuasion of separatist tendencies and divisive ideologies. At the same time, we actively promote the establishment of democratic procedures, as well as the protection of human and minority rights.

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If this Total Balkan Approach is to succeed, the international community must support such a consistent, coherent, and unified approach to Southeastern Europe. We cannot have competing spheres of influence and double standards. Principles and regulations must be applied uniformly. The international community's approach to the Balkans should be based on fostering democracy, security, and development, and integration into the European Union. Development should focus on programs that are beneficial to the entire region and promote regional cooperation. Development should also go hand in hand with the building of democratic institutions and the security of minorities in the region. Regional and international cooperation are essential to building consensus regarding individual citizens' rights to self-determination. The Balkans are peopled by a wealth of minorities. Up to and including the last century, these minorities were always the source—and very often the victims—of violent conflicts.

I believe that if these Greek principles are implemented everywhere from Cyprus to Bosnia, the door to broader regional security will have opened. The implementation of these principles will dramatically transform the role and status of minorities. Once considered a threat and a factor of destabilization, minorities will become a channel of communication and cooperation among peoples and states, enhancing the Balkan identity within a multicultural European environment. Only then can Balkan countries break free from introversion and carry forward their own cultural proposition within the new emerging Europe.

The Balkan Stability Pact and the decisions taken at the EU summit in Helsinki in December 1999 have created a new reality: a framework of principles and a roadmap for the Balkans in their course toward European integration. This is why Greece strenuously supported a meaningful candidacy for Turkey and the strengthening of relations among Bulgaria, Romania (two candidate countries), the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Albania, and the EU. This new framework should

embrace Serbia as well. As Serbia moves on to democratic reform, it should be an active part of this process. Excluding Serbia would be inconsistent with our principles of inclusiveness. Greece strongly advocates a comprehensive, consistent policy to be carried out within a specific time frame.

During the crisis in Kosovo, Greece undertook a series of diplomatic and humanitarian initiatives to restore peace and stability to the region. It was the first country to draw up a comprehensive reconstruction plan for the Balkans. From 2000 to 2005, Greece has pledged a total of GRD100 billion (approximately \$298 million) for the reconstruction of Kosovo, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, and FYROM.

The Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs spends GRD4 billion (\$12 million) every year on developmental aid to other countries. Balkan countries are our first priority, followed by the Middle East, the Black Sea region, and the Caucasus. In 1999, 50% of the GRD464.5 million (\$1.4 billion) given to Southeastern European countries was used to help refugees from Kosovo. In 1999, in association with the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established the first Greek International Developmental Cooperation Agency to support the work of Greek nongovernmental organizations.

This new approach to foreign policy calls for new and innovative forms of diplomacy, such as "citizen's diplomacy." The nongovernmental sector is an essential factor in the Total Balkan Approach, as it creates networks of interaction and cultivates mutual understanding and trust. Strengthening civil society allows our citizens to participate equally in shaping foreign policy. Only common interests can establish a common vision for long-term cooperation among all countries of the region. Citizen's diplomacy is a new, dynamic tool through which people can shape the future of their region.

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The 2004 Olympic Games in Athens will provide a unique opportunity for cultivating citizen's diplomacy. In a gesture towards our cultural and democratic heritage, Greece has revived an ancient ideal: the Olympic truce. Our dream is to bring about a global ceasefire, to coincide with the 2004 Athens Olympics. The institution of the Olympic truce represents one more contribution of Hellenism to promoting world peace.

