

16.03.2009

Right of reply of Greece

Mr. President,

I would like to exercise my right of reply with regard to the **intervention** of the distinguished representative of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

First of all, we **rejoice** to hear that our neighbor country has no exclusive claim to the term "Macedonia". It is exactly our declared policy to find a proper way to distinguish the territory and the citizens of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia **to Greeks of Macedonia** and to **Greek Macedonia** in order to avoid confusions and tensions and to cultivate an atmosphere of freedom, cooperation and friendship.

I would like, however, to remind that with the Interim Accord of 1995 concluded under the auspices of the UN, **our neighbor** has undertaken an explicit legal obligation **not** to interfere in the internal affairs of Greece in order to protect the status and rights of any persons who are not her own citizens. This provision was deliberately drafted and agreed on in order to prevent **any irredentist** intentions and **further tensions in the region over minority claims**.

Is that the actual stance of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia?

As I mentioned in my statement last Friday, Greece **fully respects** the right of every citizen to self-identify, including to associate. Greek courts have **not** prevented any forming of an association to express and promote any distinctive features; they have only rejected the forming of an association which, under the name "Macedonian", without a qualifier denoting the **Slav orientation** of its

members, creates **confusion** with hundreds of other associations founded by Greek Macedonians and using the same name.

Greek citizens are free to manifest their traditions and culture. Festivities and cultural events are regularly held in the region of Florina. I take this opportunity to note that according to UN standards, we all have to call places by the name of their respective countries.

Let me add that the political party ("Rainbow") which claims to represent the so-called "Macedonian minority", freely participates in the Greek parliamentary elections. It obtained a very small number of votes in '96 which further decreased (to 1.139 votes) in later elections.

Regarding allegations on the **right to return** we are afraid that we are faced with an eventual attempt to reopen issues that date back to the Greek civil war (1946-1949), and **despite** national reconciliation achieved within the Greek society.

Greece has adopted a series of legislative measures for national reconciliation such as law 1540 of '85, which applied to people of Greek origin who had fled the country after the Civil War. This law was never challenged before the Greek Courts. It is quite strange to hear, twenty four years later, the representative of a neighbouring country raising this issue here.

It should be reminded that the European Court of Human Rights has rejected, as **inadmissible**, applications related to property claims, against measures taken by a number of European states dating back to World War II. We stress the **cautious approach** of the Court in this respect, and its determination to **avoid** opening the Pandora's box on property and nationality.

It is also interesting to note a recent case before the same Court concerning the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Association of Citizens Radko and Paunkovski case), where the respondent Government had argued that it should protect the **identity** of its people. It is exactly what we claim for 2,5 million Greek Macedonians.

Let me conclude by quoting our Prime Minister Mr. Karamanlis, who is very Macedonian Mr. President. Speaking in Parliament, a couple of days ago, he said: 'Being myself a Macedonian, I don't feel I am a member of any minority'.

Thank you, Mr. President