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The President's News Conference With President Konstandinos Stephanopoulos of Greece

May 9, 1996

President Clinton. Good afternoon. Let me say once again what a pleasure it is to welcome President Stephanopoulos to the White House. The alliance, the friendship between our two nations is anchored by our common commitment to freedom and democracy. Much of our discussion today focused on the work we are doing together to build a peaceful, democratic, and undivided Europe. I was glad to have a chance to thank President Stephanopoulos for the leadership the Hellenic Republic has shown in resolving the problems in the Balkans, from Albania to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

I also want to thank Greece, and especially its soldiers, for helping to safeguard the peace in Bosnia. Our Armed Forces are proud to stand with you, Mr. President, in this important mission of peace. The progress we are making there reminds us all that it is possible to choose the promise of the future over the conflicts of the past. This can be the case in the Aegean as well. The United States will continue to help in any way we can to make the region one of peace and opportunity for all its people.

As I emphasized to President Stephanopoulos, the United States strongly supports the principle of respect for international agreements and the territorial integrity of all nations in the Aegean region. We are deeply concerned about the continuing dispute over the islet of Imia. I was personally involved in our efforts to convince our two NATO allies to pull back from their confrontation. And now we are trying to reduce tensions further and to settle the ownership question through an international tribunal. I believe the problems in the Aegean can and must be resolved through peaceful means, without force or the threat of force.

We also discussed the issue of Cyprus, something that has been of special interest to me since I became President. We hope to be able to take an initiative on Cyprus this year. A breakthrough in Cyprus could pave the way to further progress and be a model to other nations that are seeking peace.

Finally, I underscored to the President our commitment to fight terrorism. Greeks and Americans alike have been the victims of terrorist brutality at home and abroad. We know the pain and destruction it can bring, and we have a responsibility to do all we can to defeat it. We look to Greece to be a strong partner in this effort.

As an ally in NATO and a key player in the European Union, Greece is helping to shape the future of Europe and the next half century of our transatlantic partnership. The world's oldest democracy is reaching out to Europe's newest democracies to build an undivided, integrated continent at peace. The United States looks forward to continuing our partnership and to benefiting the peoples of both of our countries and the entire world.

Again, Mr. President, welcome to Washington. The microphone is yours.

President Stephanopoulos. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

I would like to thank once more in the warmest and most sincere way President Clinton for his kind invitation, invitation which I accepted with great pleasure. We held interesting talks in which we established once more the identical views on many important issues. The efforts of the United States of America for stability and peace in the Balkans find us in the same camp. Greece, as you know, contributes to the extent they can do to achieve the same objectives.

We discussed what we can do in order to establish peace for good in this turbulent area of the world, which was founded in bloodshed for years and years. It is high time that this region of the world lives in peace and conciliation between its peoples. I assured President Clinton that Greece, vis-a-vis these countries but also vis-a-vis Albania, for which there is common interests of the two countries, is showing the same political willingness in order to develop better political relations with one, of course, precondition, which I will reiterate: The perfect respect of the rights of the Greek minority and, more specifically, their right to practice their religion and to be educated in their own language, the Greek language, which they have spoken for centuries and centuries, as well as all the other Greeks.

We discussed for long the crisis in the Aegean, and I expressed once more the views of the Greek side in my own words and as I see it, of course. And I have been very satisfied hearing Mr. Clinton reaffirming the principles of American policy, namely respect of international principles, international treaties, territorial integrity of all states in the area. And I do believe that these principles, common principles, will finally and ultimately be implemented in the areas, so that this turbulent area of the world will live in peace and cooperation. There are other joint projects with the United States related to technology transfer, common educational programs, assimilation of democratic institutions in which Greece and the United States of America can play an extremely important role.

Our wish is to be useful to the international community. I believe that Greece, as a member of the European Union, not only serves this European ideal of peace and cooperation but also we continue to believe that the most important ally of Europe is and will continue to be the United States of America. With the cooperation between these two entities, the European Union and the United States, many things can be achieved. Greece will be present and participating in all these efforts.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Budget Negotiations

Q. Mr. President, on a domestic issue, yesterday you said that the White House and the Congress were closer together on a balanced budget plan than was ever reported in the press. And then the Republicans produced a plan that cuts back on their tax cuts and scales back on savings and domestic programs. Does that sound like a formula that you could go along with?

President Clinton. Well, I'm encouraged that they moved. I think that's encouraging. They abandoned the proposal to abolish the Department of Education, for example. That's a good thing, but I want to study the details of the program. But it appears to me that we still have significant differences and that they propose big cuts in education and in the environment and to abolish the guarantee of coverage under Medicaid for poor children and the elderly in nursing homes and for families with family members with disabilities. And I think the Medicare number appears to be still too high. But I think it's a movement in the right direction.

There are other specific things that I have concerns about. Again, they seek to abolish the direct college loan program, which has led to lower costs, better terms, better repayments for large numbers of college students. They seek to abolish the national service program. There are a lot of things in there I don't agree with, but it is a movement in the right direction. And this is the point I am trying to make now, that what we ought to do is to resume our negotiations and reach an agreement and do what we did on this year's budget instead of having a replay of a unilateral take-it-or-leave-it deal, which is what was done in 1995.

And so I hope that this is the beginning of a process that will end in a negotiated 7-year balanced budget. We plainly have the savings in common to achieve it. And we are having a better year this year than we thought we were going to have on deficit reduction. And so we can get this done if we'll do it together.

Mr. President, do you want to call on a Greek journalist?

President Stephanopoulos. Yes.

Greece-Turkey Relations

Q. Mr. President, the average Greek is very concerned about the fact that the U.S. is supporting Turkey as a regional superpower, arming Turkey and so on. You also talked about Europe's position to the use of force in the Aegean. The average Greek would like to know from you, sir, what will you do if Turkey is again going to use force in the area? What is the U.S. going to do? If I could just ask President Stephanopoulos, the senior Stephanopoulos in the room—[*laughter*]—what exactly did you ask the U.S. in terms of Greek-Turkish relations in this meeting?

President Clinton. First, let me say, I made my position abundantly clear and very clear to the Turks, including to President Demirel on his recent trip here. We do not favor—we not only don't favor the use of force in the region; we don't favor any threats of the use of force. And we have two countries that are our allies in NATO with which we have good relations. And we want to try to facilitate a peaceful resolution of the disputes in the Aegean, of the issue of Cyprus. If Turkey and Greece could resolve their differences, the potential that they have of working together to stabilize the situation in the Balkans, to promote a Europe at peace and not torn asunder by ethnic and reli-

gious conflicts, to build a better future for all of us, is staggering.

So I'm going to do everything I can to keep down not only force but the threat of force, so that we can have a peaceful resolution of all these agreements, respecting territorial integrity, based on international agreements and without any force. That is clear. And I think the—I do not expect there to be a situation in which force comes into play, because I think that the wisdom will prevail over passion, and we'll avoid that.

President Stephanopoulos. I didn't come to the United States to ask for anything. That was not the purpose of my visit. Greece does not feel the need to ask anyone anything beyond the mere implementation of international treaties and rules of international law. This is the only demand of Greece.

I hope that the region will prevail more reasonable, more peaceful points of view. I think you do know, you and Mr. Papoulias, that there are threats of war against Greece. I hope, also, that these threats will be withdrawn sometime in the future. But if they're not withdrawn, especially if these threats materialize, Greece has the possibility to defend itself very, very effectively. I do not wish to raise the tone of the discussion, but I really do hope that we will not have this opportunity to defend ourselves. I do hope that we will be able to apply international law, and I also hope that our neighbor will realize the need that these differences, some differences which have some legal foundation—and I mean, in this case, the Continental Shelf and Imia.

So I hope that Turkey realizes that the only solution is the resort to the International Court of Justice at The Hague. And in this instance, President Clinton's views and my views do coincide perfectly.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Since you came into office, you have promoted the Middle East peace process. But a Washington Post reporter writes from Cairo that Arab leaders and man on the street believe that because of your all-out support of Israel, including the attacks on the U.N. refugee camp, leaving 50 people killed, that you have lost your credentials as an even-handed, honest broker. What do you say to that?

President Clinton. Well, first of all I'd say, if you look at the fact that the United States has continued its aid to Egypt; if you look at what we have done to try to help Jordan to support its political, economic, and military objectives as it has made peace with Israel; if you look at the efforts that we have made as a government, working with other governments and working with our citizens to try to support Mr. Arafat and what he is doing and to try to ensure that the Palestinian Authority will be successful; if you look at the terms of the agreement that the Secretary of State brokered to restore the cease-fire and to make it enforceable along the border of Israel and Lebanon; if you look at all those things, it seems to me that we have quite good credentials to be fair and balanced and to pursue the interests of all the people in the region.

But I would like to remind—it's easy for the people in the region to forget because the shelling shocked everyone and the fighting, and the Israelis made no secret of the fact that they were dismayed by the deaths in the refugee center and that they did not intend to do it. But I would remind you that——

Q. [*Inaudible*]—think they didn't know where it was?

President Clinton. I would remind you—people make mistakes in war time. There are no such things as perfect weapons. Just because we're living in a high-technology age, if you think we can have sort of surgical battles in which there are never any unintended consequences, that just doesn't happen. It just doesn't happen.

But I would remind you that the Israelis were shelled. And their citizens were subject to shelling on the day—starting the day I arrived in Israel after the Sharm al-Sheikh conference, by people who didn't like the fact that we got together at Sharm al-Sheikh and who didn't want the peace to succeed. And so all—you know, what we always said is that the Israelis had a right to defend themselves.

We also support the United Nations resolution. We look forward to the day when Lebanon will be free of all foreign soldiers, when its sovereignty will be intact, and when its people will live in peace. I just talked yesterday to the Prime Minister of Lebanon on the telephone assuring him that I would do what I could to support the reconstruction of Lebanon as well as the fair implementation of this agreement.

So I think if you—as we move away from the understandable passions that were inflamed

by the violence along the border, is that as time passes and the agreement is implemented, the people in the Arab world will look at what we have done with the Palestinians, with the Jordanians, with the Egyptians, with the brokering of this agreement and what its terms are. And I think they will see that the United States has been fair and honest. We never made any secret of the fact that we did not ever intend to support anybody who wanted to attack and destroy Israel. We never have and never will.

Balkan and Aegean Development and Security

Q. Mr. President, as far as I know, your Government worked on some plans for economic development for security, stability, and peace in the Aegean Sea and Balkans. Would you like to say anything about that?

President Clinton. Is that a question for——

Q. A question to you.

President Clinton. To me? [*Laughter*] I'm hard of hearing, and unfortunately I was trying to put these on and I didn't need them. So would you ask the question again?

Q. Of course. As far as I know, your Government works on some plans for economic development for security, peace, and stability in the Aegean Sea and the Balkans. Would you like to explain to us what exactly——

President Clinton. Well, right now, obviously, in the Balkans our main focus is on trying to make sure that the Dayton agreement and the Paris peace agreement in Bosnia takes hold and works. We have also—and we are working very hard on that. We have also had discussions with the President today about our hopes for the further progress and a final resolution of the difficulties between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. I am encouraged by what has been done. But I think that is a very important part of stability and growth in the area.

And the President shared with me some of the things which are now being done between Greece and Albania. And we discussed, among other things, what could be done in terms of our partnership in spreading technology in the region in ways that would generate significant economic activity. So we discussed all these things. But most of our immediate money, right now, is going into trying to make sure that we succeed in Bosnia, and then we want to build out from there.

Rita [Rita Braver, CBS News].

Q. Mr. President——

President Clinton. Oh, I'm sorry. I apologize. I'm sorry.

President Stephanopoulos. I would like to answer that. Greece has many possibilities of its own to assist development and cooperation in the Balkans. And this is what we have been doing for a long time now. You very well know that Greek businessmen operate very effectively in our neighboring countries and there are many projects stemming from northern Greece, from which we expect a lot of results. I do also know that the American contribution will be very important and very useful. There are many possibilities for U.S. businessmen to cooperate with Greek businessmen. Greek businessmen know better than anyone else the local conditions. So U.S. and Greek businessmen should work together in order to enhance economic and industrial cooperation in the area.

As far as the Aegean is concerned, local differences should be resolved first before envisaging further cooperation, without this meaning that we exclude cooperation at this point in time. We have established all forms of cooperation with all countries, and we aspire to this cooperation also with the Turkish side. I hope that the time will come when this trade and economic cooperation will be our sole concern.

McDougal-Tucker Trial

Q. The testimony that you gave a few weeks ago for the McDougal-Tucker case is going on in Little Rock right now and is expected to be played this afternoon. I wonder if you could tell us what you want Americans to understand from what you said in your testimony, what you want the jury to understand, and also, if you still object to the release of the videotape publicly?

President Clinton. Well, my testimony will speak for itself. It will be fairly straightforward. All I want the American people to understand is that I was asked to testify because they thought I might have some evidence that was helpful, and I was glad to testify. And then what I said will be a matter of public record when it's run. If it's run this afternoon, it will be.

I believe the press should have access to my testimony. I just think that it ought to be treated like everybody else's testimony in Federal court, and it shouldn't be subject to abuse or misconstruction. I think it's a very straightforward—

it was a very straightforward set of questions, at least most of it, and I gave the best, direct, straightforward answers I could. I don't think it's a very big deal, but I did my best to answer the questions that were asked of me.

Thank you.

Q. You were basically being asked to refute testimony—[*inaudible*]—participate in a fraudulent deal——

President Clinton. I didn't say anything different in the trial that I haven't said in public on that.

Aegean Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, are you planning a Camp David summit for Greece and Turkey over the Aegean issue?

President Clinton. I guess the short answer right now is no, but what I am planning to do is to stay in close touch with this issue. I am encouraged that the representatives of Greece and Turkey have already met once and intend to meet again in Berlin in the next few weeks and seem to be moving toward a resolution along the lines of the standards that the President and I have both endorsed today, along the lines of respect for international agreements, respect for territorial integrity, no force, no threat of force. We believe that is very important.

If it becomes obvious at some point in the future that the United States could constructively play a larger role and that both parties are willing to have that done, I wouldn't rule that out. But I think the important thing is that the parties themselves have to resolve this difference, and they have to agree about the way it's going to be resolved. And I believe that the principles I just laid out had to be embraced by both sides in order for any success to occur.

But I will say again—let me just say again—I believe if the differences in the Aegean and the differences over Cyprus could be resolved so that Greece and Turkey, that are allies in NATO, could become in a general sense better partners, the impact on the whole future of Europe, the whole future of the linchpin area of the Balkans, the connection of that area of Europe down to the Middle East—and therefore the impact on all of us—the positive impact would be breathtaking.

So the rest of the world has a lot riding on whether Greeks and Turks can resolve their differences. So quite apart from the enormous interest that we have in the United States because of our large number of Greek-Americans, we know that the whole world has a lot riding on this. And so if there is anything we can do, we'll do it. But right now, the parties are trying to work it out for themselves, and I think they deserve a lot of support for that, and encouragement.

Thank you.

Yes, please, Mr. President.

President Stephanopoulos. Allow me to add that you're advancing things with your question. Greece has clarified what we can accept in terms of dialog with Turkey. We have clarified that no dialog is possible right now, because it is condemned to failure. If Turkey doesn't accept to send the Imia question to the International Court of Justice at The Hague, then the second precondition is the resolution of the Continental Shelf question through the same way.

So we do not deny dialog. But we want dialog, provided dialog is realistic and that it doesn't affect the sovereign rights of Greece and that it will be carried out according to international treaties and international law. So we should not talk about something which need not be realized now.

President Clinton. Thank you all very much. See you this evening.

NOTE: The President's 122d news conference began at 12:50 p.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. Participants referred to President Suleyman Demirel of Turkey; Karolos Papoulias, former Foreign Minister of Greece; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; and Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri of Lebanon. President Stephanopoulos spoke in Greek, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.