



## 1<sup>st</sup> Greek-Turkish Energy Forum

Istanbul, April 25, 2024

Mr. Michael B. Christides, Ambassador (a.h), Former Secretary General of the Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS) of BSEC

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I wish to express my **congratulations and thanks** to the organizers and, of course, to the sponsors and attendees for making this great Forum possible.

I also wish to thank them for inviting me to address and participate in this significant event, concerning Greek – Turkish cooperation in the sensitive energy sector.

Rest assured, I will not bother you with technical views or complex energy proposals, after all I am not an expert; **yet I do follow** developments closely, as the transition to clean energy sources should involve **all conscious** citizens given the dire consequences of climate change. As conventional wisdom goes, ours is the **first generation** that knows it must **address** the problem and the **last generation** that **can do** something for it. **This** is the huge **burden** of our generation, a burden that calls for **brave decisions** and painful yet necessary disruptions.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to also express my **surprise** that today's important event is **only** the **first** Greek-Turkish Forum **on Energy!**

I say this, because having served twice in the Greek Embassy in Ankara, the first time as Deputy Head of Mission (1996-2000) and the second as the Ambassador (2002-2005), I vividly remember the **first efforts** to discuss and exchange views on the vast opportunities for cooperation in various areas of the energy sector between our two neighbouring countries.

It was in the not-so-distant 2003 that I was arguing with the relevant Greek authorities to engage in a preliminary dialogue with their Turkish counterparts to explore the ground

for synergies in the energy sector: Greece and Türkiye, was my main argument, are both transit countries of energy, positioned between the main sources of energy at that time (Russia, Caucasus, Middle East, etc.) and the big markets in Europe. Thus, I argued, the interests of Greece correspond more with those of Türkiye than, for example, with those of Russia, which is an Energy producing state wanting to control **not only** the production but **also** the transport and distribution of energy.

It was a happy coincidence that two visionary men were the Ministers of Energy in both countries at that time: the late Dimitri Sioufas of Greece and Hilmi Güler of Türkiye. I still remember their **constructive attitude**, their **lively discussions** and their correspondence, which led to the signing in 2007 in Rome of the Agreement for the transport of natural gas from the Caspian to Italy, via the connected pipelines of Türkiye and Greece. They also pioneered the interconnection of the electric grids of the two countries, which permitted the electricity exchange at given periods and time.

Ladies & gentlemen, after these so promising **cornerstones** that laid the basis of Greek-Turkish **cooperation** in the energy sector during the not-so-distant 2003-4, you must admit that **it is** a bit disappointing we are today taking part in **only** the **FIRST** Energy Forum between our two countries.

This means, dear participants, you have a heavy burden to catch-up with all that time that went by – 20 years, more or less – and find further ways & means to elevate Greek - Turkish cooperation in the energy sector to higher levels.

Especially today, when issues like energy security and sustainability, environmental protection, clean energy transition, and responsible resource management are creating a **whole new set** of challenges – **and opportunities** – in the wider sector.

**Sure enough**, the energy scene – **and not only** – is **totally different** today then that of 2003-4: we live in a fragmented World and in a region that suffers from severe geopolitical tensions - **if not outright war!** – in a multipolar reality, where big and medium states are vying for greater chunks of influence and power-projection, with severe inequalities among states and societies, with the **finite resources** of our small planet in fewer hands and, thus, at greater risk of depletion.

In this rather **grim picture** of today's reality, I am more than ever convinced that greater **regional integration** and **cross-border connectivity** are of crucial importance because they can lead to interconnected - **and thus more efficient** – energy markets, to regional initiatives that will **enhance energy security**, stability and growth, **all** for the benefit of neighbouring countries.

In this effort, **both** Government and the private sector's stakeholders have a significant role to play: **thus, I urge you**, dear participants, to constructively **engage** in discussions, **share** your expertise and insights, **explore** every possible opportunity for collaboration

and partnership. Generate **concrete ideas**, projects and initiatives that may drive forward the Greek-Turkish cooperation in the Energy sector.

**After all**, the time is **ripe** and **right**: only tomorrow a new round of the continuing constructive and meaningful Greek-Turkish consultations of the so-called “**Positive Agenda**” will take place, **here in Istanbul**, hopefully adopting measures of common interest and benefit.

Further, on May 13, 2024, the Greek PM Mr. Mitsotakis will pay a visit to Ankara, following the successful visit of President Erdogan to Athens in December 2023, during which the substantial improvement in the overall atmosphere surrounding the relations between the two countries has been confirmed.

Personally, I **firmly believe** that Greece and Türkiye share many common **goals and interests** in the energy sector, such as **enhancing energy security**, diversifying energy sources, promoting sustainable development and addressing climate change.

I am **also convinced** that the prevailing today atmosphere of dialogue and cooperation between Greece and Türkiye undoubtedly **corresponds to** and **reflects** the **true feelings** of friendship that the great majority of the Greek and Turkish people embrace for their respective neighbours. I know that because I had the privilege of serving in hospitable Türkiye for almost 13 years, 7 in the Greek Embassy in Ankara and 6 as the Secretary General of the BSEC organization in Istanbul, the most mature and effective vehicle of regional cooperation in our wider Balkan and Black Sea regions.

Ladies & gentlemen, I **sincerely hope** that the first Greek-Turkish Energy Forum will pave the way, through **your contributions and commitment**, to host the second Forum in the very **near future**, perhaps in Greece, this time.

Good luck in your deliberations and thanks for your kind attention.