

# **143<sup>rd</sup> IPU Assembly**

**Madrid, Spain // 26-30 November 2021**

## **General Debate on Contemporary Challenges to Democracy: Overcoming Division and Building Community**

Speech of Mr. Stefanos Gkikas

Head of Greek Delegation

Mr. President,

Mr. Secretary General,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all I would like to answer to the Turkish delegation and about what is happening in the Aegean Sea.

It is a self-evident obligation and duty for every country to protect its borders.

It is undisputable that Greek authorities operate with absolute respect for International and European Law, as well as the rules of involvement at sea. After all, Greece has consistently demonstrated its commitment to applying International Law at any time.

Turkey, on the other hand, not only does not respect its commitment to the EU, but, on the contrary seeks the illegal entry of refugees and immigrants into Greece. Turkish Coastguard clearly escort immigrants to the sea border disregarding their safety. The visual evidence is well known to everyone.

From 2015 we had 5.500 incidents and Greece saved 250.000 refugees and immigrants.

These are the facts!

Now, coming to the main item of our General Debate about contemporary challenges to democracy.

Different countries face different challenges. Challenges stemming from the quality of democracy, the existing political mentality, the country's history, financial or social problems, etc.

In the EU, during the last decade, some countries – including Greece – countered severe challenges due to the financial crisis and the widespread economic distress and austerity that brought our societies to its limits. It was a hard period that led to growing public discontent over social injustice and austerity measures and gave the opportunity for the rise of populism and especially the ultra-right populism.

In addition, in 2015 – while the financial crisis was at its peak - the Migration crisis, with the highest levels of displacement ever recorded, knocked our door – Europe's door – and caused tremendous problems. The combination of these two crises – a lethal combination actually - was the reason for the rise of ultraright – and ultraleft – populist movements in many European countries fueling anti-European sentiments and racism that deepened social divisions. This poses a threat to Democracy!

In Greece we had a bad experience on that. Due to these crises, the distrust to the democratic political system by the people, was evident, and thus the populists of the ultraright party “Golden Dawn” found the “space” to move forward. Became the third most powerful party in the Greek Parliament, turned against immigrants and used austerity measures to propel the people's reaction, introducing fascist practices and “national prominence” rhetoric....

This development illustrates the danger that the political system and the political establishment faces when population's discontent and distrust are present. And give us a clear signal for the necessary changes and immediate actions we have to take.

Greece's example visualizes that social division can lead to a serious challenge for democracy. But it also shows that these crises can be overcome by strong and stable democratic institutions and democratic practices.

We are committed to defend and protect our fundamental values, the rule of law, human rights and our democratic institutions, institutions respected by the people and

democratic practices. We have to protect social cohesion, strengthen community rebuilding and enhance democratic practices. And the best way to achieve that, is by persistently implementing policies against people's inequities, inequality and social divisions, against poverty and austerity and by strengthening democratic institutions.

Nevertheless, we the Parliamentarians, have to enhance our cooperation, share knowledge and experience and provide our governments with ideas and policy proposals, in order to overcome challenges and strengthen Democracy.