

**KOSOVO TALKS EU: International Conference organised by the British Council  
Prishtina, Monday October, 31 2011.**

**Address by Ambassador (retired) Alexandros Mallias, Special Advisor to ELIAMEP (Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy, Athens).**

The theme of today's Conference "Kosovo Talks EU" sounds very familiar to Greece and personally to me.

I certainly do not have in mind, as most of you I presume do, the Homeric "beware of Greeks bringing gifts".

Let's be pragmatic. Nobody today is expecting gifts from the Greeks. The Greeks themselves, also recently learnt the hard way – under the hardest terms – that the European Union and the Eurozone is not the Iliad, inspired by the expedition of the Mycenaeans, Spartans, Athenians, Salaminians the Myrmidons of Achilles the fall of Troy, but rather the Odyssey.

We restart from the scratch. We have to learn how to navigate safely through Scylla and Harybdis, and keep our ears closed, to the songs of our sirenes (politicians). Well, in the context of our Odyssey, what truly matters is the journey to Ithaka.

Yet, the way to Ithaka has always been both an individual and collective journey.

Pessimism, lack of self-confidence, a dramatically decreasing trust to our political leadership, coupled with a recent lack of confidence to the European Union and to the European leaders are, to my deepest regret, the basic characteristics of the present feelings of my generation, as we move slowly to the retirement process.

Yes I am sad and disappointed. Because my generation was and still is the most pro-European generation in Greece. Why? Because for most of us, since our youth and the underground student movement during the obsolete era of the military dictatorship, EUROPE has always been our ideology.

It meant to us and for us freedom, liberty. The European Union was our Ithaca.

I am not here in Prishtina today to lecture you how to behave if you wish to see your country, the Republic of Kosovo transformed, member of the European Union.

I earlier confessed that Kosovo's journey to the European Union is familiar to the Greeks. I was

honored to preside the committee tasked since 2001 to draft the Programme for the Western Balkans of the 2003 Greek EU Presidency . In this context, I do not want to appear modest.

Anyway, modesty is not a flower often growing in greek gardens.

In fact, the formulation of the Presidency's Programme was the following:

“The modalities of the inclusion of Kosovo in the Stabilisation and Association Process will have to be addressed ,with full respect of Resolution 1244 and within the concept “European standards before status”.

What appears today to be an anachronism, was indeed a small revolution in 2003. For the first time in EU's as well in Kosovo's history, Kosovo was under specific terms included in the SAP process.

As we were moving closer to the Thessaloniki Summit ,I visited several times Prishtina for tuning our violins with the Kosovar political leaders and Ambassador Steiner. Working with the orchestra proved to be an easier exercise than than working with the maestro.

The presence of late President Ibrahim Rugova and then Prime Minister Bairam Rexhepi, along with UNMIK ,at the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Thessaloniki was a landmark and indeed the founding stone of Kosovo's path to European Union.

On Kosovo, the Thessaloniki Agenda, adopted by the European Council on June 20, specifies that “The EU reiterates its support for the full implementation of UNSC 1244 and of the “Standards before status” policy. On this basis, the people of a multiethnic and a democratic Kosovo will have their place in Europe “.

Furthermore, the operative part of the Thessaloniki Agenda contains the following language on Kosovo:

“The Council stressed also the need for a multiethnic and democratic Kosovo to further advance towards the EU within the SAP,in full compliance with UNSC 1244. Sustainable returns and integration of refugees, as well as economic development to the benefit of the entire population should remain top priorities. Expressing its support to the "standards before status“ policy ,the Council called upon the provisional institutions to focus more on building the necessary capacities for reforms and their implementation ,within the transferred competencies. The Council recalled the importance it attributes to a dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina on practical issues of mutual interests”.

Greece ,as it was restated here in Prishtina last month by Foreign Minister Lambrinidis, considers that Kosovo is entitled to have his own place in what is usually referred by Athens as the AGENDA 2014. Implying that all Balkan countries should join the accession process.

The Agenda 2014 project, with its content yet to be specified , should not create illusions.

Basically it is meant to rejuvenate EU's enlargement policies towards the Western Balkans. Ten years ago, the European Commission was cautious and reluctant to the enlargement process.

Now , there is a solid majority of Member-States on the reluctance side.

In other words, the ball is rather in the camp of the potential candidates.

My understanding is that the enlargement process, open to all Balkan countries, is the indispensable soft-power mechanism the catalyst for changing attitudes and policies the vehicle for solving problems. The problems are in the Balkans, Yet, they are also European ones.

Albanians and the Republic of Kosovo have many fiends in Europe.

Notwithstanding the fact that Greece has not, so far at least, recognised Kosovo we do have a good level of relations. This was recently restated by Prime Minister Hashim Thaci.

I also want to emphasize that Greece could and should do more to enlarge the scope of its relations with the Republic of Kosovo. After all, Kosovo is our neighbour ,our younger neighbour.

For greek and albanian drivers it takes something more from one hour to drive from General Jankovits to Evzonoi. It takes a little bit more for all those labelled as "the internationals".

Be sure that within the scope of application of the AGENDA 2014, you can count on Greece's support within the European Union.

Yet, the European integration process is based on common understandings and the search for mutually acceptable solutions to open problems. The key word is compromise.

Recently, the Commission paved the way for engaging Serbia's accession process.

There is still hard talk to Belgrade's leadership. Mostly in relation with your country, Kosovo.

The EU conditionality on Serbia is Copenhagen Plus. Nevertheless, I would not be surprised to see that, in due course, what today appears formally or informally to be the EU's conditionality for Serbia's accession talks, tomorrow will also stand under different terms, for Kosovo.

That is something that both leaderships in Prishtina and Belgrade should bear in mind.

They might also wish to remember that there are not permanent friends, partners and allies. There are only permanent interests. And the interests change.

Kosovo is an independent country. This will not change. Everybody knows that, including the Serbs.

Notwithstanding present or future developments in the northern bank of River Ibar as well as progress or lack of progress in the dialogue between Belgrade and Prishtina, there is also something that will not change.

Kosovo and Serbia will live together as neighbours. Whatever is the outcome of the dialogue to be resumed, Serbia will be Kosovo's neighbour and Kosovo will be Serbia's neighbour.

Both countries and both leaderships have a clear obligation .

To lay down the conditions for the next generation .The generation of Serbs and Kosovars holders of the European passport.

They owe that above all to their own children. They must be the generation of hope, of peace and of reconciliation.

As members of the European Union, united and not divided by their common border where will prevail the European Union's Lex (Law) and not EULEX.

Dear friends, I already tried to draw some parallelism from our individual and collective journey with the metaphore of the long voyage to Ithaka. Drawn from the contemporary greek Odyssey.

So, you will not be surprised with my choice to close my remarks with CAVAFY's version of Ithaka , as translated by Edmund Keeley.

" As you set for Ithaka

hope the voyage is a long one,

full of adventure,full of discovery.

Laistrygonians and Cyclops angry Poseidon-don't be afraid of them:

you 'll never find things like that on your way

as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,

as long as a rare excitement

stirs your spirit and your body.

. . .

Keep Ithaka always in your mind.

Arriving there is what you are destined for.

. . .

And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.

Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,

you will have understood by then what these Ithakas mean."

Dear friends,

Throughout the long journey to its European Ithaka, Kosovo and the Kosovars can count on the Greeks to counter Poseidon and the Cyclops.-