**On the agreement between Greece and Albania to address the ICJ for a final settlement of their maritime borders**:

“This is of course a positive development that the two countries have agreed to find a peaceful, judicial way to resolve this dispute This will be the start of a long process that will lead to the settlement of all the remaining problems and disputes between the two countries while Albania hopefully in the coming years will be joining the EU”

**On the question for whom it was a good agreement**:

“I think it is good for both countries in the sense that there will be a third party, a judicial, official body of the UN that will settle the dispute for good, the dispute of the two countries. The two countries will sign an agreement on the terms of the dispute that will be submitted to the ICJ. It is called “arbitration agreement” and on the basis of that and on the basis of international law, of course, the court will decide on finalizing and settling the dispute between the two countries. It is a judicial way, it is a way based on international justice and I would say it is a European way, a European way of solving disputes through international law and the involvement of neutral third parties. I very much doubt that the two sides will agree on the document before the Albanian elections. I think it will take several months to negotiate this official document that will be submitted. After this document is submitted, it will take maybe a couple of years before the court reaches a decision. But it remains to be seen”.

**On the decision of Athens to extend its territorial waters to 12 n.m before reaching an agreement with Tirana:**

“The Greek government just started the process of extending its territorial waters at the western part of the country to 12 nautical miles. It is not final, the process is not final, it will take a bit more time to finalize the official procedure for this, but this is according to international law and the convention of the law of the Sea; a prerogative, the right of every state to extend its territorial waters to 12 miles, that will not put Albania into any difficult position, because Tirana accepts according to the international law the right of every country to extend its territorial waters to 12 nautical miles, in the exact way that Albania has 12 nautical miles territorial waters. Additionally, this move will clear the way, for the two countries to follow the right procedure, the right international procedure to reach an agreement with the help of the international court. I do not think Albania or anyone else should take this, perceive this as a way against Albania in any way. It is just an act of its own according to the international law. It is not directed against Albania in any way”

**On the reaction of opposition parties in Athens for the agreement between Greece and Albania:**

“There is an overall positive atmosphere in Greece about this issue. As it happens in Albania, in Greece also, foreign policy issues become a question of rhetorical argument between the government and the opposition; this happens every time and usually- as it also happens in Albania - there is always some criticism against the government from the “patriotic standpoint”. As it usually happens, the opposition is asking for more. This is happening everywhere, as it also happens in Albania, as I am following closely Albanian politics and media. I think, however, that there is a consensus for both in the government and the mainstream parties of the opposition that disputes must be resolved. And this is a first move that will allow the two countries to continue resolving all the disputes. By the time Albania – and soon I hope – will be joining the EU, all disputes with Greece will have been resolved and we will have a new partnership between the two countries.

The fact that we need time to resolve these disputes is also because the trust between the two countries both between the two governments and between the two societies is low. It is very unfortunate that Greece and Albania that share so many things, culturally, historically, politically the last 30 years -after the end of communism- lost the opportunity to build a solid relation of partnership and trust. But, the process of Albania joining the EU- which is fully supported by Greece- will be a period as well as a process that will help us not only resolve our disputes, but also to build trust, to build bridges between our two societies. I cannot imagine the two countries moving forward in the future, in the 21st century further without being close friends and allies. I believe this is necessary and it is to the benefit and interest of both countries”.

**On the question who has forbidden the trust between the two countries:**

“There are of course, as in every country, both political and non-political civil society actors, who have an interest in relations not being at best. They gain political points through animosity, hostility, through lack of trust between the two countries.

At the same time, I think that there have been certain instances in relations which have undermined trust. Another reason is that the media play a negative role in both countries. We have extended studies in our institute over the years, especially about the relations between Greece and Albania and the role of the media and I have to say that there is so much stereotyping in both counties about each other, there is so much prejudice in the public discourse in Albania about Greece and in Greece about Albania.

But both countries can do better and if we are to become truly European partners in the EU and in the entire Balkans, we need to work to dismantle these stereotypes, to dismantle prejudice. Greece should dismantle prejudice and negative stereotypes about Albanians, but also, Albanian media, politicians, civil society, intellectuals should do the same about stereotypes and prejudices that they have against Greece. It is a long process, it will take time, but I cannot imagine the two countries being members of the EU and having this level of distrust. We need to work in that direction”

**On the question whether addressing the ICJ could be seen a failure of the political class in Albania**

“First of all, I have to say that I am a great admirer of international life and cooperation. I do not see in what way a judicial process, a process of the UN guided by the international law is a failure. It is a great achievement of the 20th century that we have international organizations and international law regulating the international affairs. So, in my view it is good that we have international law regulated relations.

Whether this could have been done without the involvement of the ICJ, it could have been possible. Let me remind you that there was the agreement of 2009, which was failed to materialize because of the decision of the Constitutional Court of Albania. Additionally, there have been extensive negotiations between the Greek and the Albanian government during the ministerial tenures of Dmitir Bushati and Nikos Kotzias. Unfortunately, even though they have progressed a lot, they have not been able to reach an agreement.

So therefore, I think the two governments realized that maybe because of the lack of trust, maybe because of the bad atmosphere created by the media but also in the opposition, it would have been easier to rely on the international law and a court to offer the international legitimacy, legal legitimacy to any agreement.

I do not blame them. I have to say that lack of trust is a serious problem in a relation between the two countries. So, maybe the court will help both sides to accept the agreement without serious domestic, opposition troubles”.

**On the question whether Greece has addressed the ICJ before for any similar agreement**:

“Greece wants to take disputes with Turkey to the ICJ. This is a standard policy and Turkey is the country resisting so far at least the idea of taking this dispute over maritime zones to the court. Greece has reached an agreement with Italy and Egypt without the use of the judicial part, of the ICJ because the countries managed to reach a political agreement but I don’t see why using an internationally legitimate and legally solid body of international justice could be a problem for two countries reaching an agreement.

The Albanian side should always keep in mind that this will be the first step for settling many other disputes, smaller and bigger that exist between the two countries. This is the start of a process that will bring the two countries closer and will make the two countries partners in the context of the EU. And I do not think that we should allow prejudices between the two countries to undermine the efforts to build trust. We must give it a try”.