

PRESS RELEASE

International Prize of Peace of Westphalia 2020

Speech by Alexis Tsipras, former Prime Minister of Greece

THE SPOKEN WORD APPLIES.

I would like to warmly thank the Economic Association of Westphalia and Lippe on receiving this important Peace award.

An award that I have the honour of sharing with the Prime Minister of North Macedonia. And I would also like to thank the President of Latvia for his words. Historically, the Balkans have been a difficult region to promote peace. We have seen war burn the hopes of many generations.

And nationalism destroy the branches of peace and prosperity when they were starting to grow.

This is why the goal of the Prespa Agreement was to develop deep roots in the conscience of our peoples and the relations between our countries.

We wanted an Agreement that would last and not fall apart at the first difficulty.

An Agreement that would not only resolve the differences between us, but bind us in a new strategic partnership in order to confront challenges and seize opportunities, together.

This was not easy particularly at a time when both our countries were in economic crisis

and at the front line of the worst refugee crisis after the Second World War. It was not easy, at a time of national retrenchment and Brexit in the EU

It was not easy at a time when the EU had frozen the enlargement process and was interested in the Balkans mostly to control migration flows.

At a time when the United States were moving away from multilateral diplomacy.

And at a time when nationalist forces were strong.

In our countries as well as the rest of Europe.

But the people of Greece and North Macedonia proved that common problems can be solved peacefully and on the basis of international law.

Even at the most difficult moment.

They can be solved if we keep an open mind, we have the necessary political will and we speak on the basis of mutual respect.

We proved that Europe can be a catalyst for peace and stability instead of - waiting for others to take the lead,

- or kicking the can down the road

- or making statements that mean nothing to peoples' lives.

Today this message is even more important than it was in 2018 and 2019.

The experience of the global pandemic crisis, as well as the developments we see in Afghanistan should be giving us a lesson:

that we cannot go back to the economic and geostrategic models of the last 40 years.

It must be clear that in these extraordinary conditions, the EU will fail as an international force if it does not develop a clear, reliable, assertive voice for peace.

And peace means resolving regional differences, protecting international law and promoting sustainable development and social justice.

When it comes to regional differences, the clearest test is in Europe itself: the Western Balkans, the Cyprus issue and the Eastern Mediterranean.

The EU must support the Prespa Agreement actively.

It must do whatever it takes to hold Intergovernmental Conferences for North Macedonia and Albania, as well as to make progress in the Belgrade-Pristina talks.

And the EU must give a clear message to Turkey that the only possible solution to the Cyprus issue is the reunification of the island on the basis of UN Security Council Resolutions.

It must underline that relations will improve only if it respects the sovereign rights of Greece and the Republic of Cyprus.

But also the EU must deal with conflict resolution in the broader region.

Together with the United States, it must take the lead in establishing a new security architecture in the broader region, that includes regional powers, as well as Russia and China, depending on the conflict zone.

In the case of Afghanistan in particular, the EU must support such a framework.

It must also support neighbouring countries in hosting Afghans, but also organize a resettlement program of Afghan refugees to the EU, directly from these countries, with specific quotas.

In terms of social justice, the EU must make even more steps in confronting the pandemic and growing inequalities.

For example, it is more important than ever to accept the proposal of the World Health Organization on waiving the patents on vaccines to strengthen vaccination programs in the developing world.

And, of course, it is extremely important that Europe makes even more steps in the just transition to a green agenda against the climate crisis.

Today, it is our honor to share this award with the organization "Plan for the Planet" that has planted millions of trees.

As you know, this year alone, hundreds of thousands of acres of forest-land were burnt by wildfires in Greece.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Centuries after they were signed, we honour the Treaties of Westphalia because they established a NEW framework for interstate relations on which peace was built.

Today, more than ever, we need a NEW balanced international framework aimed at promoting peace, through initiatives on all the levels I mentioned.

Particularly after the German and French elections, it is time that the EU takes the lead in this direction.

And I am convinced that the Prespa Agreement can contribute significantly to this necessary, new European and global vision.

Thank you very much.