

Joint statements of Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Venizelos and his Montenegrin counterpart Igor Lukšić (Podgorica, 18 February 2014)

I. LUKSIC: Allow me to express my particular pleasure at the visit to Montenegro of the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Greece, the Presidency of the European Union. This visit to Montenegro and the region is aimed at encouraging us to continue our course towards the European Union, which we hope will be successful for Montenegro and for the whole region.

I want to congratulate Greece on assuming the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, as well as on the very specific priorities of the Hellenic Presidency. We consider that, within the framework of the Presidency, one of the priorities is the encouragement of the European course of the Western Balkan countries.

I briefed the Minister on the current situation in the efforts we are making on our European course, as well as on the Intergovernmental Conferences of December, of March, and – we hope – of June, in cooperation with Greece. And I hope that we will schedule future meetings as well. Based on the agreements we have signed, we also talked about the future steps with regard to the opening of chapters that concern various sectors of our accession course.

I also briefed my collocutor on the course of Montenegro's accession to NATO and the efforts in that direction. I thanked him for the support we have received to date on this issue, and we talked about the future steps on this course, regarding which the Defence Ministry is making significant efforts.

We also looked at the agreements we intend to sign, as well as at the implementation of the existing agreements aimed at developing cooperation, particularly in the economic sector.

I want to thank Mr. Venizelos once again for this visit and to express my warm wishes for the next stops on your tour of the region and for the promotion of the priorities of the Hellenic Presidency of the EU.

E. VENIZELOS: I thank my colleague, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Montenegro, for his warm welcome. I thank him because he adapted his schedule and moved forward his return from Budapest so that we could have this opportunity to meet.

I am visiting Montenegro, first and foremost, in my capacity as President of the Council of Ministers of the European Union during this semester.

But on a bilateral level as well, it is a very great pleasure and opportunity for me to talk to the Montenegrin leadership about the high level of and prospects for our bilateral relations.

Montenegro's accession course is particularly effective and positive, and we are very pleased at that. We want this course to continue and to intensify during the six months of the Hellenic Presidency. I want to praise and welcome the great efforts Montenegro has made to lay the foundations of its European course and perspective. Many major steps have been taken. Constitutional amendments have been adopted. New legislation has been introduced on issues related to democratic institutions, rule of law, independence of the judiciary, and combatting of

corruption and organized crime. But still other steps must be taken, in accordance with the European standards.

I had the opportunity to talk not only to my counterpart, but also to the President of the Republic and the Speaker of Parliament. I have ascertained the strong political will that exists here, in Montenegro, regarding the country's European perspective, and I am certain that the necessary resolve exists for all the necessary changes to be introduced.

As Minister Lukšić said, many specific steps will be taken in the coming months to strengthen the pace of Montenegro's accession process. A few days ago, I had the opportunity to address the European Parliament's Plenary and present the very advanced point Montenegro is at on its accession course.

We also see Montenegro's aspirations to join NATO. Greece is a very old member of NATO. We have been participating in NATO for 62 years, and just as we are collaborating on a bilateral level on Montenegro's EU accession course, we are also prepared, on a bilateral level, to work together on the preparation of Montenegro's course towards NATO membership.

On the bilateral level, relations are excellent. Greece is a major foreign direct investor in Montenegro. We encourage the presence of Greek enterprises in Montenegro. We know that the government is making great efforts to shape an environment that is friendly to businesses and investments – particularly foreign ones. Our bilateral relations have very great potential for further development, and we will make the most of this, as we agreed with my counterpart.

In closing, I want to congratulate the Montenegrin people and wish them every success in fulfilling their very well-founded Euroatlantic aspirations at the soonest possible time.