

Administration of Barack Obama, 2016

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras of Greece in Athens, Greece

November 15, 2016

Prime Minister Tsipras. I want to thank the American President, Barack Obama, very warmly for visiting Greece and for choosing Athens, the birthplace of democracy, for his—for one of his last stops before concluding his 8-year term as the American President.

The Presidency, during which the image of the United States of America around the world has changed—even in this country, where, during the cold war era, Greek American relations were—have accumulated heavy, historic burden—a very heavy, historical burden. And I think it was a historic moment when, during the previous visit of an American President in Greece in 1999, President Clinton recognized the errors of the U.S. as regards the dictatorship in Greece. Because the American—the Greek people do not only relate to the ancient traditions; they have fought—they have shed blood until recently—to defend the values of democracy and freedom, which are our common values.

Therefore, Greece is now welcoming an American President who, throughout his term in office, has strongly defended these values; who has fought for the rights of all people, irrespective of color, religion, or sexual orientation; who has worked in order to deal with climate change; a President who has integrated millions of Americans into health care; a President who has put his strength and his influence behind a humanitarian solution of the great refugee crisis, the greatest after World War II.

And I should also like to point out—because this is very important to Greece—this is a President who, in—when he had to deal with the 2008 economic crisis, has led the American economy on a completely different path than the one that Europe has chosen. Eight years later, the result is more than visible. Quantitative easing, commitment to employment, which was the choice of the United States, have led to impressive growth rates and decline in unemployment. While on the other side, the insistence of European leaders to austerity policies keeps the European economies trapped in stagnation, and it, therefore, brings about huge political and social problems.

And it is in this respect that I had the opportunity to discuss with President Obama about the huge challenges that our country—but also the whole of Europe—is dealing with. These are challenges that needs to be dealt with collectively, decisively, and effectively. Otherwise, we will be led to—backwards from a political and a social point of view.

We have, therefore, agreed that for the modern society—for modern societies to have help—and hope and aspirations is the only reply against the increasing trend in skepticism and inward looking, which is a threat to modern democracies. The international community, when trying to avoid historic mistakes of the past, saw this issue clearly when, in 1953, and with the assistance and support of the United States of America, they settled the German debt and they linked it to a growth clause. Today, the strong Germany, which is the powerhouse of—financial powerhouse of Europe, should think in the same manner.

Greece and the Greek people have recently had to deal with the most—the harshest consequences of the global and European economic crisis. As an economy and as a society, we have had to experience a program of disastrous austerity, which made the problems more acute

instead of resolving them. Within a few years, we have lost 25 percent of our GDP, while in 2004, unemployment went up to 27 percent.

Today—and despite what we have suffered—we are still standing. We were able, through great sacrifices, to avoid the threats and the threatened disaster, and we are, step by step, restoring our economy. Today, for the first time in years, we are back to growth. Slowly but surely, we are decreasing unemployment, and we are restoring confidence to the future of the Greek economy.

About 18 months ago, although we were a young government, we were asked to take very difficult decisions. And with this opportunity, I want to recognize publicly the role and the contribution of President Obama, during those difficult moments, to recognize his moral and political support he gave to my government in the effort to find a political solution.

Difficult decisions were made not only in order to keep our country in the euro zone, but also in order to maintain the cohesion of the European Union. And I believe that our decisions were right, as shown by history. We have made difficult reforms in the social security, in taxation, in public administration, but I have—we have always taken measures to fight corruption, to attract investment, to create a better context for investment in Greece.

We will continue to decisively promote reforms that will promote growth. And at the same time, we will continue to negotiate hard in order to avoid any reforms that would undermine growth. But what is more important to all of us is that society should understand, should feel the results of all that and to make the burden to the weak members of society lighter and also for the younger and productive generation, because after 7 years, people cannot take any more austerity.

The important reduction of the Greek debt, the reduction of the surpluses which are expected of us in the future, and the participation of the Bank of Greece in the quantitative easing program are rightfully—should be rightfully given to Greece. And the time to do that is now.

And from this point of view, I think that it is not only symbolic, but it is also very important that Barack Obama is now in Athens and in—the day after tomorrow will be in Berlin at this very critical point in time when decisions are expected, decisions that would not only concern Greece; they concern Europe and therefore the global economy. Cooperation and solidarity are necessary requirements in order to bring about the solutions that will once again bring stability to the European integration and bring it back to the track of growth.

And in relation to that, President Obama and I discussed a number of important issues, such as the continuation of our bilateral economic and business cooperation: more specifically, the important potential for investments in Greece in a series of sectors, such as energy, tourism, agro-food, research, and technology. We also discussed the future where Greece, with its important shipping power, can become an important transit center for trade, transport, and energy, linking Europe to Asia and to North Africa.

We also discussed the important projects underway which upgrade the role of our country in the—on the energy map, such as the TAP, the IGB pipelines, the upgrading of the LNG terminal, and the FSRU in Alexandland—in Alexandroupoli, which is now being designed. Also, we discussed the possibility of opening new natural gas corridors in the Eastern Mediterranean, which will play an important role to peace and stability in our region.

We have also discussed the excellent Greek human potential—human capital—and especially young scientists. We have stressed the huge potential opening from—for the cooperation between the American and the Greek business communities in the fields of innovation and startup companies in Greece. And we have also discussed the current regional developments, the great challenges in security, migration, the need to strengthen our cooperation on these issues.

We have discussed the critical role that Greece plays as a pillar of peace and security in a region where stabilization is on the grow. Me—it's a country of Europe, of the Eastern Mediterranean, of the Balkans, of the wider Black Sea neighborhood, which promotes—steadily promotes—bilateral and, alongside Cyprus, the tripartite cooperation with all the countries of the region on the basis of international law; a country which is using its role as an active member of the EU and NATO to promote peace, stability and security in the region, and which is gradually strengthening its role in order to promote border security and cooperation against terrorism.

A country which, despite its financial difficulties, has offered support to hundreds of thousands of refugees who arrived on its shores. A country when—which, when the Balkan corridor was unilaterally closed, and despite the pressure exercised on it to violate our common values, still insists that the only way to deal with the refugee issue is respect for international law, cooperation with transit countries and countries of origin, and dealing with the origins of migration—with the reasons of migration. And in this framework, we have discussed the importance of implementing the EU-Turkey agreement and continuation of NATO operations in the Aegean.

We have stressed the needs to do whatever possible to promote peace and stability in Syria, Iraq, and Libya. The hardship, the fighting against civilians should stop, and terrorism should be fought decisively.

We have also stressed the need to restart the credible talks on the Middle East issue. And in this framework, I have underscored my commitment to dialogue and cooperation with our neighboring Turkey, a country that plays important role for the future of our region. But I still stressed that the promotion of these important relations can only take place on the basis of mutual respect, without threats of war and questioning of sovereign rights.

And of course, we have discussed the Cyprus issue: the need to find a fair and viable solution on the basis of U.N. resolutions and the—compatible with the fact that Cyprus is an EU member state. We have therefore expressed our support to the very important, critical bicomunal talks which are underway. Tomorrow I will be meeting President Anastasiadis, who will be in Athens.

We need to be very careful at this very critical point in relation to these talks, because important issues are still pending. Our objective is to achieve a solution that will benefit all of the Cypriots and a solution that will promote the confidence building on the island. And this, in our view, cannot happen without the departure of the occupation army and without doing away with the obsolete system of guarantees.

So, before I conclude, I should like to once more thank President Obama for opting to visit our country. I would like now to remember the words of another important American President, who, during the previous century, had to fight in order to deal with challenges similar to the current ones: security, economic crisis, or migration of movements of populations. And he had said that real freedom for people can only exist whenever there is

security and independence. And he had only said—he has also said that famine and unemployment are the raw material for dictatorships. These words are very topical nowadays. And I am certain about peoples who are committed to common values will fight in any—in every way to deter any possibility of us going back into history.

It is our duty to make a leap into the future, and I believe that we will make it. Thank you.

President Obama. Kalispera. [Laughter] Thank you, Prime Minister Tsipras, for your kind words and for welcoming me to Athens today. I've always wanted to come to Greece, and I'm delighted to be able to make this part of my last trip overseas as President of the United States.

I think we all know that the world owes an enormous debt to Greece and the Greek people. So many of our ideas of democracy, so much of our literature and philosophy and science can be traced back to roots right here in Athens. I'm told there is a saying from those ancient times—*kalos kai agathos*—when someone or something is good and beautiful on the outside, but it's also good and noble on the inside, in terms of character and in terms of purpose. And I think that's a fine description of the friendship that exists between the Greek people and the American people.

The ideas of ancient Greece helped inspire America's Founding Fathers as they reached for democracy. Our revolutionary ideas helped inspire Greeks as they sought their own freedom, and Americans came here to help fight for Greek independence. At the dawn of the cold war, when President Truman committed the United States to the defense of Greece, he said, "I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way."

To this day, the United States is profoundly grateful for our friendship and alliance with Greece. And I'm personally very grateful to my many friends in the Greek American community, sons and daughters of Hellenes who have found success in every walk of American life. And, Alexios, I want to thank you for your commitment to our alliance and for the good work that we did today.

As the Prime Minister already noted, we spent much of our time discussing the economic situation here in Greece and how Greece can continue to move forward. I know this has been a painful and difficult time, especially for Greek workers and families, pensioners and young people. This crisis is not an abstraction, but has had a very concrete and devastating impact on the lives and livelihoods of millions of people across this country.

In our meeting, Alexios outlined next steps, including reforms to make Greece more attractive to investment and to prevent the kind of imbalances that led to the debt crisis in the first place. In other words, Greece, under his leadership, continues to do the hard work necessary to recover.

At the same time, I've been clear from the beginning of this crisis that in order to make reforms sustainable, the Greek economy needs the space to return to growth and start creating jobs again. We cannot simply look to austerity as a strategy. And it is incredibly important that the Greek people see improvements in their daily lives so that they can carry with them the hope that their lives will get better.

And in this context, as Greece continues reform, the IMF has said that debt relief is crucial. I will continue to urge creditors to take the steps needed to put Greece on a path towards a durable economic recovery, because it's in all of our interests that Greece succeeds. We all want the Greek people to prosper, to be able to provide a good life for their families and

their children. That would be good for Greece. That would be good for the European Union, good for the United States, and ultimately, good for the world.

Beyond economic issues, we discussed the pressing security challenges that we face as NATO allies. I want to take this opportunity to commend Greece for being one of the five NATO allies that spends 2 percent of GDP of defense, a goal that we have consistently set, but not everybody has met. Greece has done this even during difficult economic times. If Greece can meet this NATO commitment, all our allies should be able to do so.

We also discussed the need to continue sharing intelligence to help prevent terrorist attacks; the importance of keeping sanctions, including EU sanctions, in place until Russia has fully implemented the Minsk agreement, along with Ukraine.

As I did privately with Alexios, I want to thank the Greek people publicly for their humanitarian response to the crisis of so many migrants and refugees seeking safety in Europe. Greeks, especially on the islands, have shown extraordinary compassion, and they've rightly earned the admiration of the world. Again, Greeks have done so even as they've faced their own great economic hardships. And that's a testament, I think, to their solidarity and commitment to treating people with kindness and fairness.

Prime Minister Tsipras has made commitments to increase housing for unaccompanied children and to improve access to education for children who are migrants and refugees. And in these goals, it's an obligation of the United States to help, because this cannot be viewed just as a Greek problem, this is an international problem. And I reaffirmed my support to help in any ways that we can, including reaffirming America's support for the deal between the EU and Turkey that can manage arrivals in Europe in a way that is orderly and humane.

Finally, as Alexios mentioned, we discussed Cyprus, where the prospects for a just, comprehensive, and lasting settlement are the best that they've been for some time. It doesn't mean that success is guaranteed, but the possibility of resolving a decades-long conflict is there. And we urge the parties to continue their work. The interests of all Cypriots would be advanced with a bizonal, bicomunal federation. We're hopeful that a solution that's durable, which would create new economic opportunities for all the people across Cyprus is within reach. And it would be a powerful example to the world of what's possible with diplomacy and compromise.

So, again, Mr. Prime Minister, thank you for welcoming me. Thank you for your partnership. The Greek people have gone through some very difficult times, and there's still a hard road ahead. But despite those hardships, Greece has continued to be a reliable ally, has shown true compassion to fellow human beings in need. It's an example of the Greek character. And I'm looking forward to the opportunity to say more to the Greek people in a speech that I'll deliver tomorrow. For now, on behalf of the American people, just let me say that we are proud to count Greece as one of our closest allies and one of our greatest friends.

So efharisto. [Laughter]

Moderator. We will now proceed to questions. There will be two questions from Greek media and two questions from American media. First question, Mr. Charitos from ERT [Panos Charitos, ERT], the state TV.

U.S. Economy/Greece's Economy

Q. I want to take you 7, 8 years back, when you entered the White House, the unemployment—the rates of the unemployment, it was 6 percent, the next 2 years up to 11.6, and today, you managed to leave it back with 5 percent, which is the lowest ever.

President Obama. Four-point-nine.

Q. Four-point-nine. [Laughter] The GDP of your country, you managed to grow it almost 3—2.6 trillion. So, on the contrary—of course, there is nothing to compare between Greek and United States economy—but on the contrary, Greece, the last 7 years is following the treatment of the financial institutions—the foreign financial institutions, and we're still in the eye of the storm of the recession. So, in the same time, there is no discussion about the debt relief. So my question is, how far this economy can go with this reform programs without any discussion of the debt relief? How far this relationship between Greece and the foreign institutions can last?

President Obama. Well, you're right that it—you can't entirely compare between the United States and Greece for a range of reasons, not just because of the size of the economy. We went through a very severe contraction. We were losing 800,000 jobs a month when I came into office. In fact, the economy was contracting faster than it did during the Great Depression. But we were able to intervene, apply lessons learned, and stabilize and then begin growth again.

But I do believe that one of the lessons we tried to apply is that it is important to combine structural reforms and good fiscal stewardship with a growth strategy. Because when your economy is growing and more revenue is coming in, that helps relieve debt. And sometimes, if your only approach is cutting spending at a time when the economy is contracting, then the economy will contract further, and that could add debt.

Now, the advantage we had is that the dollar is the reserve currency of the world. Even in the midst of crisis, people were still buying U.S. Treasury bills. We were not part of a broader arrangement like the euro zone. So it gave us some additional flexibility.

And—but the key lesson that we've drawn from our experience—and it's true that we recovered faster and better, frankly, than most of Europe—is that particularly when the economy is still struggling, putting people back to work, finding ways to spur economic activity ultimately can help to reduce the structural deficits and debts that countries experience.

I think the path that Greece is currently on is the right one. You've engaged in some very difficult structural reforms. And I think the Greek people—although it is difficult and challenging, and the politics of it, I know, are not good—should appreciate the fact that in this global economy, the Greek economy was going to have to go through some structural reforms. We all do, all the time. The United States has to go through structural reforms in terms of improving our education system or revamping our infrastructure or looking at some regulations that weren't properly controlling excesses on Wall Street. So we initiated—or health care reform—we had to initiate a whole range of structural reforms.

They're not the same as the ones that Greece has had to do, but these were necessary reforms. And the Prime Minister and his government being willing to move forward on those, I think will lead to Greece being more competitive and a more attractive place for investment in the future. Look, and the Greek people are entrepreneurial. There are enormous resources in this country. My hope is, is that more and more investors around the world see an opportunity to do business here in Greece.

But even as you have those structural reforms, our argument has always been that when an economy contracted this fast, when unemployment is this high, that there also has to be a growth agenda to go with it. And it is very difficult to imagine the kind of growth strategy that's needed without some debt-relief mechanism.

Now, the politics of this are difficult in Europe. And I think in fairness to some of the governments up north that I know are not always popular here in Greece, it's important to recognize that they have their own politics. And their populations and their institutions often are resistant to some of these debt-relief formulas.

But I think that having seen Greece begin many of these difficult steps toward structural reform, having shown a commitment to change, with the Greek people having endured some significant hardships for many years now, there should be an opportunity, I think, for both sides to recognize that if we can come up with a durable solution, as opposed to each year or every 6 months having a new negotiation, that that could potentially be good for everyone. And now that the Greek economy is growing again, the timing may be right.

White House Press Secretary Joshua R. Earnest. The first question from a White House reporter will come from Jerome Cartillier of AFP [Agence France-Presse]. Jerome.

2016 U.S. Presidential Election/United Kingdom Referendum Vote To Leave the European Union/International Populist Movements/Economic Globalization

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

President Obama. Yes.

Q. A lot of people in Europe are still struggling to understand what happened on November 8 in the United States. Do you believe it's the exact same dynamic as Brexit, which happened 6 months before? And does it have to do with leaders struggling to read the mood of their country? Do you have the feeling that, while in power, you underestimated anger or resentment or fear in America?

And to you, Prime Minister Tsipras, President Obama has repeatedly said, including today, that Greece should get substantial debt relief. From your conversation with him today, do you—are you hopeful that he might convince Chancellor Merkel to make a move in that regard later this week?

President Obama. No two countries are identical. And obviously, there's a difference between a referendum on a very complex relationship between Great Britain and the rest of Europe and a Presidential election in the United States.

Presidential elections always turn on personalities. They turn on how campaigns are run. They turn on natural desires for change. If you've had an incumbent who has been there for 8 years, there's a temptation to think, well, let's maybe make a change. I think there are a whole range of factors involved.

But I do think that there is a common theme that we've seen in a lot of advanced economies and that we've seen around the world, although they manifest themselves in different ways. Globalization, combined with technology, combined with social media and constant information, have disrupted people's lives, sometimes in very concrete ways—a manufacturing plant closes, and suddenly, an entire town no longer has what was the primary source of employment—but also psychologically. People are less certain of their national identities or their place in the world. It starts looking different and disorienting.

And there is no doubt that that has produced populist movements, both from the left and the right, in many countries in Europe. When you see a Donald Trump and a Bernie Sanders—very unconventional candidates—have considerable success, then obviously, there's something there that's being tapped into.

A suspicion of globalization, a desire to rein in its excesses, a suspicion of elites and governing institutions that people feel may not be responsive to their immediate needs. And that sometimes gets wrapped up in issues of ethnic identity or religious identity or cultural identity. And that can be a volatile mix.

It's important to recognize, though, that those trends have always been there. And it's the job, I think, of leaders to try to address people's real, legitimate concerns and channel them in the most constructive ways possible.

Did I recognize that there was anger or frustration in the American population? Of course, I did. First of all, we had to fight back from the worst recession since the Great Depression, and I can guarantee you, if your housing values have crashed and you've lost your—most of your pension and you've lost your job, you're going to be pretty angry. And so we fought—fought back and recovered. But that left, I think, fear and anxiety in a lot of people, a sense that the economy wasn't as certain as it could be, and maybe the game was rigged on Wall Street or by special interests in Washington or what have you. And that's been there.

I was also aware of it because of the fact that you have seen some of the rhetoric among Republican and elected officials and activists and media—some of it pretty troubling and not necessarily connected to facts, but being used effectively to mobilize people. And obviously, President-elect Trump tapped into that particular strain within the Republican Party and then was able to broaden that enough and get enough votes to win the election.

The lesson I draw—and I think people can draw a lot of lessons, but maybe one that cuts across countries—is, we have to deal with issues like inequality. We have to deal with issues of economic dislocation. We have to deal with people's fears that their children won't do as well as they have. The more aggressively and effectively we deal with those issues, the less those fears may channel themselves into counterproductive approaches that pit people against each other.

And frankly, that was—that's been my agenda for the last 8 years. I think raising wages, investing in infrastructure, making sure that people have access to good educations that are—equip them for the jobs of the future—those are all agenda items that would help alleviate some of those economic pressures and dislocations that people are experiencing. The problem was, I couldn't convince the Republican Congress to pass a lot of them.

Now, having said that, people seem to think I did a really—pretty good job. And so there is this mismatch, I think, between frustration and anger. Perhaps the view of the American people was, is that we just need to shake things up. Time will now tell whether the prescriptions that are being offered—whether Brexit or with respect to the U.S. election—ends up actually satisfying those people who have been fearful or angry or concerned. And I think that's going to be an interesting test, because I think I can make a pretty strong argument that the policies we put forward were the right ones; that we've grown faster than just about any advanced economy. The country is indisputably better off, and those folks who voted for the President-elect are better off than they were when I came into office, for the most part. But we'll see whether those facts affect people's calculations in the next election.

Prime Minister Tsipras. You asked if I believe that Angela Merkel could be convinced to make on—but which are the necessary steps for the recovery of the Greek economy. Well, my answer is I'm very optimistic, and this for two reasons. Number one, Angela Merkel is a German politician, and Germans sometimes insist—sometimes they are disagreeable, but they insist—that the agreements must be honored.

And what is expected to happen with Greece is that which was agreed last July, August, in the summer of 2015, that was as soon as Greece shows that it has decided to proceed with the courageous and difficult reforms, that when the first and most difficult review is completed, then decisions will be taken, measures will be implemented to reduce—to provide debt relief to Greece so that Greece can go out into the money markets and for growth to return at a very high rate in the Greek economy.

So the first reason for my optimism is that just as the German Finance Minister used to say, *pacta sunt servanda*. This is a Latin expression, which we sometimes use, where—although we have learned not Latin, but Ancient Greek in our schools.

The second reason for which I'm optimistic is that I have met Angela Merkel to—in person; so has Barack Obama. We worked very close together during the period of the huge refugee crisis. Our cooperation is very good, and therefore, I'm of the opinion that she is a responsible politician, a politician who has a sense of responsibility for Europe and not only for Germany or for the—her political party. And this was the manner in which she dealt with the refugee crisis: with a deep sense of responsibility on the future of Europe and on stability.

And for these two important reasons, I do expect that she will be convinced that these two necessary steps must be made—two steps that will not be a burden to German taxpayers—so that Greece can become not a member—a part of the problem, but a part of the solution for security, for growth, and for resolving the refugee issue, for which Greece plays an important role.

And that is why I'm optimistic, and I expect my optimism to be realized.

Moderator. Mr. Ignoti from Ethnos. Question number three.

Cyprus/U.S. Economy/European Union

Q. It means a lot for us for you to be here. My name is Michael Ignoti. I'm the correspondent in Washington for Ethnos newspaper and Mega TV. You said many times, Mr. President, that the way the Europeans handled the economy—the economic crisis—had the opposite effect. And also, you talked many times against the austerity. And of course, you are right. Why, in your opinion, you didn't succeed to convince the Europeans to follow your way? And what are you going to do the last 2 months to help Greece and the Greek people? Also, I have a short question about Cyprus. Both of you, you talk about Cyprus. And it's a dear issue for me because I born in Cyprus. How can you convince the President of Turkey to end the occupation of Cyprus, Mr. President?

President Obama. Well, let me take the second question first. This is ultimately a negotiation between Cypriots: Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots. And the good news is that you have two leaders who seem genuinely committed to finding compromises and an approach that would serve both their peoples well. If in fact you can see a meeting of the minds between them, then the issue will be can we make sure that all of us, the international community—Turkey, Greece, the United States—support that agreement in a way that can be ratified by both sides.

And we have invested a lot of time. Vice President Biden has been actively involved in this. We are encouraged by the progress that's been made. I think there's a window in the next few weeks, months, where this issue was actually resolved. And I think if we can find an equitable solution, it won't provide a hundred percent of what either side wants, there may be some mechanisms for a transition from the status quo to the future that both sides envision, but I think it's achievable. And we're going to do everything we can to support the process.

With respect to the economy and Europe, again, I think it's important to recognize that in some ways my job was simpler because, at least in the first 2 years, I had majorities of my party controlling Congress. And I'm just one country. [*Laughter*] So Congress is hard to deal with. [*Laughter*] Dealing with multiple Parliaments and commissions and unions and this and that and the other and—that's very complicated. And so the need, I think, to operate by consensus, the fact that not all European countries were similarly situated, even though their economy shared a currency, that made their task more difficult. And so I want to make sure that I'm clear that I don't envy the hard job that each European leader had in circumstances that oftentimes they had inherited.

What I've tried to do is just offer our best thinking, whether it's in resolving problems in banks quickly—because the quicker you resolve the problems with banks and there's transparency in that process, the faster they recapitalize and are able to make investments. When the economy is shrinking, providing jobs, spending on things like infrastructure can actually increase revenue and drive down debt. And then, there's going to be a time at which point that has to be taken care of.

I mean, for example, in the United States, our deficits went up in those first 2 years because we were engaging in a lot of emergency spending. Our deficits have now been reduced by two-thirds, primarily because we started growing again, and we started taking in more tax revenue.

So there's some lessons, I think, that are applicable for all countries. And what we've just tried to do is offer the best advice that we can, understanding that when you're dealing with multiple nations, but a single currency, and then a European Union, where some people are in the currency and some people are not in the currency, and a European Parliament and European Council and—that's a lot of meetings. [*Laughter*] Okay?

Prime Minister Tsipras. I will fully agree with what President Obama has just said in answering the question about Cyprus. It is not a bilateral issue. It is not a problem between Greece and Turkey. It's an international problem, which has been going on for 42 years—as long as I'm alive—and it is a problem of illegal invasion and occupation of the northern part of Cyprus. We make our best, we do our best in—to encourage both sides to help them reach a fair and equitable and sustainable solution.

In my first visit to Cyprus as a Prime Minister, I tried and I did meet over and above the leaders of the Republic of Cyprus, a number of representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community. And I think that that was the first time that a Greek Prime Minister was meeting with them. We are interested in making sure that the people of Cyprus will be able to live in a reunited Cyprus where they are free, where there's a democracy, freedom, and Cyprus is a member of the European Union.

So I would like to make it clear that as regards Greece, we are in favor of a solution. We stand by the side of President Anastasiadis, who is making the effort, and we are only ready to discuss with Turkey the part which is relevant to us; that is the guarantees. Because since 1959,

since 1960, this obsolete issue of guarantees also concerns Greece. But Greece is not the country which has occupied and illegally—invasion and illegally occupied Cyprus.

So I believe that a fair and sustainable solution means a solution without the permanent presence of Turkish troops on the island. And at the same time, I think that the best guarantee for the Cypriot people to feel safe is the potential of a fair and sustainable solution. And if this happens, things will change not only for Cyprus, but for the wider region, in general and for Greek-Turkish relations. This is how we are proceeding.

I believe that, yes, President Erdogan plays an important role, but it is not my responsibility to convince him, Mr. Ignati.

Mr. Earnest. The final question will come from Chris Jansing with NBC News.

2016 Presidential Election/The President's World View

Q. Thank you. Mr. President, ever since the election there have been protests on the streets of the United States. And earlier this year, Matt Lauer asked you if you believed you helped create the environment for Donald Trump to run. And you answered, talk to me if he wins about how responsible I feel about it. I wonder, do you feel any responsibility for the election of Donald Trump? And in the broader context, when you see his election, when you look at politicians like Theresa May, Marine Le Pen, do you believe that it is either a movement away from or an outright rejection of your world view?

And, Mr. Prime Minister, you've also talked about your concerns about the rise of the extreme right in general. And about Donald Trump, in particular, you said, I hope we will not face this evil. Do you believe Donald Trump or his ideas are still evil? And if so, do you believe your comments and the comments of other European leaders will make it more difficult for you to work with him? Thank you.

President Obama. Well, first of all, I think it's fair to say that I was surprised by the election results, and I've said so. I still don't feel responsible for what the President-elect says or does. But I do feel a responsibility as President of the United States to make sure that I facilitate a good transition and I present to him as well as the American people my best thinking, my best ideas about how you move the country forward, to speak out with respect to areas where I think the Republican Party is wrong, but to pledge to work with them on those things that I think will advance the causes of security and prosperity and justice and inclusiveness in America.

I think it's important not to start drawing parallels, for example, between Theresa May, a fairly traditional conservative politician, who is now Prime Minister, and Le Pen in France. Those aren't the same, and the situation in each country is different.

I do think, as I've said before, that history doesn't move in a straight line. It zigs and zags and sometimes goes forward and sometimes moves back, sideways. I think at times of significant stress, people are going to be looking for something—and they don't always know exactly what it is that they're looking for—and they may opt for change even if they're not entirely confident what that change will bring.

As you know, throughout my Presidency—I'm sure as a matter of convenience—I generally haven't paid a lot of attention to the polls. But since your question is directly related to the notion of a rejection of my world view, last I checked, a pretty healthy majority of the American people agree with my world view on a whole bunch of things. And I know that that begs the question, well, how is it that somebody who appears to have a very different world

view just got elected? As I said, sometimes, people just feel as if we want to try something to see if we can shake things up. And that, I suspect, was a significant phenomenon.

I do believe, separate and apart from any particular election or movement, that we are going to have to guard against a rise in a crude sort of nationalism or ethnic identity or tribalism that is built around an "us" and a "them." And I will never apologize for saying that the future of humanity and the future of the world is going to be defined by what we have in common as opposed to those things that separate us and ultimately lead us into conflict.

Take Europe. We know what happens when Europeans start dividing themselves up and emphasizing their differences and seeing a competition between various countries in a zero-sum way. The 20th century was a bloodbath. And for all the frustrations and failures of the project to unify Europe, the last five decades have been periods of unprecedented peace, growth, and prosperity in Europe.

In the United States, we know what happens when we start dividing ourselves along lines of race or religion or ethnicity. It's dangerous. Not just for the minority groups that are subjected to that kind of discrimination or, in some cases in the past, violence, but because we then don't realize our potential as a country when we're preventing Blacks or Latinos or Asians or gays or women from fully participating in the project of building American life.

So my vision is right on that issue. And it may not always win the day in the short term in any particular political circumstance, but I'm confident it will win the day over the long term. Because societies in which we are able to unify ourselves around values and ideals and character and how we treat each other and cooperation and innovation ultimately are going to be more successful than societies that don't.

That's my strong belief. And I think I've got pretty good evidence to prove it.

Prime Minister Tsipras. To be honest, I know very little of Donald Trump. I got to know his aggressive manner and the manner in which he defended some unconventional points of view during the election period. Some have told me that I should have read his book before going to bargain in Brussels, "The Art of the Deal." I didn't. But I don't think that that was decisive to the result.

Still, let me point out that it was one thing what we knew about Donald Trump when he was seeking to become the candidate for the Republican Party; another thing during the election period; and now that he is the President-elect; and it's quite another when he will be the President of a country that is a major player, a global player.

So that is why, contrary to some of my colleagues in Europe, I did not rush to repeat some of the criticisms that many of us have made during the election period about Donald Trump. I also believe that if someone would want to rapidly change the foreign policy of a country such as the United States—which is very difficult—and although some of us in Europe may fear that this may happen, what we should be doing is build bridges, not walls. We are proceeding on the basis of common values. We have more to gain from partnership, from promoting our partnership in dealing with the big global challenges.

I therefore believe in the near future, not much is going to change in the relations between EU, Greece, and the United States of America. These are relations that were forged under very difficult conditions and rely on the common values of our people.

President Obama. Thank you, my friend.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 4:20 p.m. at the Maximos Mansion. In his remarks, the President referred to Sen. Bernard Sanders, in his capacity as a 2016 Democratic Presidential candidate; Prime Minister Theresa May of the United Kingdom; and Marine Le Pen, president, National Front political party in France. Prime Minister Tsipras referred to Minister of Finance Wolfgang Schaueble of Germany; and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey. A reporter referred to Matt Lauer, coanchor, NBC's "Today" program. Prime Minister Tsipras and the moderator spoke in Greek, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Joint news conference :: Greece, Prime Minister Tsipras.

Locations: Athens, Greece.

Names: Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Le Pen, Marine; May, Theresa; Sanders, Bernard; Trump, Donald J.; Tsipras, Alexis.

Subjects: Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Civil rights : Minorities :: Minority rights and ethnic tolerance; Communications : News media, Presidential interviews; Congress : Bipartisanship; Cyprus : Economic growth and development; Cyprus : Reconciliation efforts; Economy, national : Household income and wages; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Global competitiveness; Elections : 2016 Presidential and congressional elections; Europe : European Union :: Currency union; Europe : European Union :: United Kingdom, membership status; Greece : Economic growth and development; Greece : President Obama's visit; Greece : Prime Minister; Greece : Public debt, restructuring assistance; Greece : Refugees, humanitarian situation; Greece : Relations with U.S.; Greece : Public debt, restructuring assistance; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Presidency, U.S. : President-elect; Refugees and global migrants : Humanitarian situation; Russia : International and U.S. sanctions; Terrorism : Counterterrorism efforts; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts; Ukraine : International diplomatic efforts; United Kingdom : European Union, membership status; United Kingdom : Prime Minister; White House Office : Vice President.

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