
Foreign Minister's contacts with the leadership of Israel and the Palestinian Authority focus on the Middle East Peace Process

At noon on Monday, the Foreign Minister arrived in Ramallah, where she met with the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, the head of the Palestinian negotiators, Mr. Saeb Erekat, and Finance Minister Mr. Salam Fayyad. The Foreign Minister stated that "there is now a momentum that should not be lost" and that the Palestinian people deserve to have their own state and live in peace. She also stressed that "the Arab initiative, the Quartet initiative and the meetings within the EU framework are aimed at helping reinvigorate the peace process." Ms. Bakoyannis encouraged Mr. Abbas to continue his meetings with Mr. Olmert, stressing that dialogue is always the only answer to violence.

In his statements, Mr. Erekat referred to Greece's contribution to re-launching the bilateral dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians and stressed that President Abbas reiterated to the Greek Foreign Minister his commitment to make every possible effort to reinvigorate the peace process with Mr. Olmert, and also expressed his confidence regarding his cooperation with the Israeli Prime Minister. According to Mr. Erekat, Ms. Bakoyannis encouraged Mr. Abbas to commit to the continuation of efforts with Mr. Olmert, stressing that Greece, the EU, the United States, and the Arab countries, are focusing on the need to reinvigorate the Middle East peace process and to implement a two-state solution.

Mr. Erekat also pointed out that President Abbas particularly appreciates the fact that Greece's Foreign Minister is in Ramallah, saying that this reflects the Greek government's and the Greek people's serious interest. Mr. Erekat stated: "You are more than welcome for all your efforts to reinvigorate the peace process; many Palestinians would like to see you in other Palestinian territories as well."

The Foreign Minister's contacts with the Israeli leadership culminated in her meeting with the country's Prime Minister, Mr. Ehud Olmert. The prospects for peace in the Middle East were discussed at the meeting and it was confirmed that Greece is welcomed as a reliable and sincere partner by all sides, and that it can contribute to efforts aimed at breaking the cycle of violence and giving the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue a new dynamic. Foreign Ministry spokesman Mr. George Koumoutsakos stated, adding that "Greece's sincere, consistent, unselfish interest in the region and in efforts to ensure security, stability and peace is well known".

Following her meeting Sunday evening with her Israeli counterpart, Ms. Tzipi Livni, Ms. Bakoyannis referred to Europe's responsibility to contribute to the peace process to the best of its ability. Ms. Livni acknowledged the role of the Quartet in the process and underlined that there is room for initiatives within the framework of the Arab League and the Quartet. The Israeli Foreign Minister stressed that her country, the EU and Greece share the same values and needs, with the goal of supporting moderate forces and exerting pressure on extremists, while also promoting the peace process.

Ms. Bakoyannis also met with the leader of the Meretz political party, Mr. Yossi Beilin, and her itinerary also includes a meeting with the Vice Premier of Israel, Mr. Shimon Peres.

The Foreign Minister was received on Monday morning by Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem and All Palestine. During their meeting, they discussed the Patriarchate's relations with the government of Jordan and the Foreign Minister assured the Patriarch of the Greek government's support. The Foreign Minister informed the Patriarch that the Greek government is aware of the problems that exist: "On behalf of Prime Minister Mr. Kostas Karamanlis and the Greek government, I would like to assure you that Greece will always aid the Patriarchate's efforts. The Patriarchate can always rely on the Greek government, which always respects its autonomy and independence."

The next leg of the Foreign Minister's tour is Syria. She will visit Damascus on Tuesday, 12 June, where she will have meetings with the country's leadership and with the Patriarch of Antioch.