

Ambassador Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos

The Crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Belt and Road Initiative

This is the edited transcript of the presentation of Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos to Panel 2, “Runaway Inflation or Glass-Steagall?” of the Schiller Institute’s June 18-19 Conference, “There Can Be No Peace Without the Bankruptcy Reorganization of the Dying Trans-Atlantic Financial System.” Mr. Chrysanthopoulos has served as Greece’s Ambassador to Poland, Canada, and Armenia. He is a former Secretary General of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC). A subhead has been added.



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belongs to Turkish jurisdiction.

The situation has become critical, and it cannot be excluded that an armed conflict erupts between these two NATO countries, which would give a great satisfaction to Russia, seeing NATO in further disarray. Turkey is also threatening to invade Syria in order to create a 30-kilometer zone [inside] Syria proper that Turkey would not allow the Kurdish YPG to enter.

And for its own reasons, Ankara is blocking the entry into NATO of

Sweden and Finland. It’s quite clear that these two countries will not join NATO, since they will not turn over to Turkey political refugees. Ankara has not adopted sanctions against Russia, and is mediating, or trying to mediate, between Moscow and Kyiv.

Greece has become a U.S. extension, and has signed a mutual defense cooperation agreement with Washington, giving its military bases in Greece at Alexandroupolis to the Americans. Athens thinks that these bases will protect Greece from an attack [from] Turkey, while Washington considers them as part of the encirclement of Russia. It is doubtful whether these bases will do anything in case of a Turkish attack. Athens is following orders from Washington, and has thus sent weapons to Ukraine. It has resisted removing armed personnel carriers that are on Greek islands until Germany sends their replacements first, in order not to leave these islands unprotected. But it seems that this plan has fallen apart, because the Germans cannot guarantee to send these weapons beforehand.

Serious Crisis for Greece, Mediterranean

The economic situation in Greece is not good. After ten years of austerity measures imposed by the memoranda of the EU, the public debt as a percentage of GNP has increased from 124% in 2010, to 211.9% in 2020. This disaster might have been avoided had Germany agreed to return to Greece the €450 billion—yes, €450 billion euros—that it owes from war reparations

Hello from Aeon, Greece! I am very happy to participate tonight in this important meeting.

Witnessing what has been going on, on the planet, since December, gives one the impression that serious political leaders no longer exist, and they are still behaving incoherently, and doing everything possible to destroy humanity. The situation in the eastern Mediterranean was complicated enough before the war, but now it has even become more complicated, basically because of Turkey, which is taking advantage of the war in Ukraine to promote its own agenda.

Turkey, for the first time in its relations with Greece, has raised the issue of the sovereignty of the Greek islands adjacent to Turkey, and has been questioning, saying that these islands were wrongfully given to Greece and should have been given to Turkey, even though the international treaties are very clear on it. Violations of Greek airspace and territory are a daily occurrence, while on the political level, Turkey has cut off all high-level talks with Greece. Turkey has also prohibited Greece from making drilling explorations in the waters near Crete for oil and gas, claiming that the area is in Turkey’s jurisdiction. The same applies to other areas also, and now Ankara will start drilling explorations in the Aegean Sea. Furthermore, Turkey does not allow the Republic of Cyprus to proceed with exploration in the waters north of Cyprus, saying again that the area

and from the 1941 loan. But Berlin refuses even to discuss it, while it has no problem accusing Russia of having committed crimes against humanity in Ukraine. The increase in energy and food prices is not making the situation easier in Greece. Being a U.S. extension, Greece is also facing problems with the traditional enemies of the U.S.A., like Iran. Upon request of the U.S.A., Greece apprehended a tanker of Russian interests carrying Iranian oil, which according to the U.S. authorities, would be used to finance terrorist activities or launder money. Teheran apprehended two Greek tankers in reprisal, and after a Greek court found the impounding of the tanker carrying Iranian oil illegal, the tanker was released, the impounded oil returned; thus, opening the way for the release of the two Greek tankers.

The situation in the Middle East has not changed, with Israel implementing an apartheid regime on the Palestinian territories, bombing Syria, threatening Iran, and using state terrorism to execute Iranian senior officials. One cannot see any possibilities of positive changes there.

Another threat endangering humanity is the attempt of the U.S.A. to present China as an enemy, like Russia. Here, Washington is making a big mistake. A country with a civilization of more than 5,000 years, that has contributed so much to humanity, cannot be named as an enemy by a country that is 300 years old and has created such damage to the world since the end of the Second World War.

Would it not better for all if the big countries of the world decided to work together to develop the planet for the benefit of humanity? Instead of trying to control it and increase their zones of influence, they should stop their killing machines, their threats of nuclear holocaust. They should liberate themselves from the influence of the military-industrial complex. They should get rid of their blindfolds, and see how humanity and themselves can prosper under peaceful conditions.

The ‘Primordial Role’ of the BRI

This is where the Belt and Road Initiative—the BRI—has a primordial role to play. The BRI project, when and if completed, will integrate the Eurasian continent by land—rail and road—and by sea. Goods will be exchanged between the two sides quickly and without big cost. Projects are being implemented concerning the BRI both in Europe and in Asia. Closer bilateral cooperation between China and the countries of Europe is required. The Maritime Silk Road also involves Greece, where the activities of COSCO [China

Ocean Shipping Company], in the port of Piraeus, constitute a most important activity to date of China’s One Belt, One Road approach in Europe.

The U.S.’s negative position is the most important element that could hinder progress of the BRI. Efforts—bilateral, multilateral, or others—should be undertaken by the participants in order to convince Washington of the benefits that it would have by participating in this project. In this sense, closer contacts with Japan, Australia, and India are needed to examine how the Asia-Africa growth corridor could be incorporated within the BRI project.

A basic prerequisite for the implementation of this project is that peace and stability must prevail, and sanctions must be eliminated—something that cannot happen today. However, the implementation and promotion of this project can also facilitate peace initiatives if the parties in conflict are able to understand that their participation in the BRI greatly surpasses possible benefits from victorious conflicts. This applies to the U.S., Russia, the EU, China, and the countries of Asia and the Middle East, including Turkey, Iran, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Israel.

Such was the experience with the Black Sea Ring Highway, where differences between some Black Sea member states—BSEC [Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization] member states—were able to be softened down to the extent that the highway was allowed through zones of frozen conflicts. It might also help in the pacification of the European war that’s being waged in Ukraine. It might also pacify the eastern Mediterranean.

In a world where armed conflicts and violence prevail, and international law has ceased to exist, it is important to stress the role of culture, of philosophy, of humanism and spirituality. They must be transported through the Silk Road in the form of exchange of ideas and culture between the East and the West. The Schiller Institute, through the active participation of Helga LaRouche in many international fora, and by organizing meetings like today’s, is positively contributing towards peace in Europe and in the world.

In conclusion, the successful implementation of the BRI can play an instrumental role in the humanization of international relations, the economic and cultural development of populations of the participating states, and in this way create conditions for global peace. But first, global leaders must get rid of their blindfolds and start seeing again. It might sound utopian, but if we don’t believe in utopia, it will never happen. Thank you very much.