

# ***Interview with The Deputy Minister of National Defence Mr Nikolaos Chardalias***



territorial integrity, political independence and sovereign rights, as well as guaranteeing a sense of security for every Greek citizen. That said, our current main objective as Ministry of National Defence is boosting our power projection capabilities in the entire area of the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean. I firmly believe that we are on the right track for cementing Greece's status as a factor of stability in the South Eastern flank of NATO and the EU.

## **Greek Defence News: What are the Hellenic Armed Forces' transformation priorities?**

The Hellenic Armed Forces went through a decade-long period of austerity and budget cuts, as a direct result of the financial crisis that plagued our country. Those days belong in the past. Our government has undertaken an ambitious effort to build a force that by 2030 will be able to secure the 21<sup>st</sup> century battlefield against all kinds of threats, both conventional and asymmetric. To this end, we place special emphasis on the

modernization of our joint operations doctrines, the enhancement of our cyber defence capabilities and the further professionalization of our enlisted personnel.

## **Greek Defence News: Are you optimistic about the future of the Greek-Turkish Relations?**

As ever, Greece strongly desires amicable relations with Turkey. We believe that cooperation between our countries would be beneficial for the people of both of them. However, Turkey insists on taking the counterproductive path of provocations, illegitimate claims and violations of International Law. During the last months, we have also borne witness to its ambiguous position towards Russian aggression against Ukraine, which threatens to undermine NATO's much needed unity of response in a time of crisis. Certainly, this is not the kind of posture that we would call suitable for improving not only our bilateral relations but also Turkey's relations with the rest of the Alliance. However, we always leave the door open for a rapprochement, should Turkey change its attitude and commit itself to dialogue in good faith, within the framework of International Law.

The National Defence of Greece is planned, determined and implemented in the framework of a broad institutional, political and military concept. Greece's Emerging Security Challenges and the Hellenic Armed Forces Modernization outline the main priorities of the Hellenic Ministry of National Defence.

From significant defence purchases and agreements with allies such as France and the United States, to the volatile relationship with neighbouring Turkey, the implementation of Greece's Defence Policy aims to strengthen the country's deterrence capability.

The Deputy Minister of National Defence Mr Nikolaos Chardalias in an exclusive interview given to the Greek Defence News reports on the latest developments.

## **Greek Defence News: What are the greatest challenges facing Greece's defence policy?**

Our defence and national security policy aims first and foremost at the protection of our country's



**Greek Defence News: How do you assess the current security situation in the Balkans, North Africa and in the Middle East? Which is the role that Greece has to play?**

We live in a volatile era of international turmoil. The Russian invasion of Ukraine ushered the Western world in a new era, where the need for a new security architecture (including a radically revised energy security strategy) in Europe is stronger than ever before. This is not to say that preceding problems in other hotbeds of the globe have suddenly disappeared. For example, the illegal occupation of the northern part of Cyprus persists. Revisionist powers continue to intervene with unacceptable methods, including the illegal use of force, in Syria, Libya, and elsewhere. The Middle East remains a boiling cauldron of tensions. On the contrary, Greece stands as a pillar of stability and democracy in the region, with the rule of law as the central tenet of its foreign and defence policies. As such, our country will continue to advocate and act in favor of Western unity and common European defence and foreign policy, while aligning and coordinating its position with other like-minded actors in the region.

**Greek Defence News: Which are the procurement program's priorities for the Hellenic Army, Navy, Air Force under the current defence budget constraints?**

During the past three years, our government has attached particular importance to the need to decidedly boost the capabilities of our Armed Forces in the air and naval domains. I will not expand on the milestone acquisition of three Belharra frigates (plus another in option) or twenty four Rafale fighters, and their armaments, since those initiatives are by now well known to the public. I will, however, underline that there are many other substantial procurement programs pending for the three service branches of the Armed Forces. For example, we have activated important support programs for the flying transport assets of our Army, like the Boeing CH-47 and NH-90 helicopters, we have agreed with the United States for the procurement of seven MH-60 'Romeo' helicopters with exceptional ASW capabilities, and we are rapidly proceeding to the integration of 1.200 M1117 Armored Security Vehicles allocated to us by the USA through the Excess Defence Articles (EDA) program.

**Greek Defence News: The Hellenic defence industry is facing a wide variety of problems, the most important of which is its development. How is the Hellenic Ministry of Defence assisting this target?**

It is true that the national defence industry was neglected during the previous decades, for various well-known reasons. However, during the last three years, our government has undertaken a systematic effort to reverse this unacceptable situation. That is why, for example, during the negotiations with France for the conclusion of the recent Strategic Partnership Agreement, we insisted on the inclusion of a specific provision for the advancement of cooperation between the defence industries of the two countries. In addition, Greece is a pioneer in the field of EU defence industry. We are actively involved in the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), in six cases as project coordinators, as well as the European Defence Fund (EDF). Both these initiatives provide excellent opportunities for developing the industrial base and increasing the competitiveness of the Greek defence companies. All things considered, I am confident about the medium and long-term prospects of the defence industry sector. The potential is there, the government's support is there, the inherent Hellenic aptitude for innovation is there.

**Greek Defence News: What are your views for the European defence industry and how will the European Defence Agency provide them?**

I recently participated in the ministerial meeting of the Steering Board of the EDA in Brussels. During the meeting, we were presented with the results of an EDA analysis concerning the investment gaps in the EU defence field and approved the establishment of a 'Hub for EU Defence Innovation', aimed at strengthening the Agency's existing innovation activities and initiating new ones. The Greek Government's firm belief, which I expressed to our European partners, is that the developments in Ukraine highlight the need for enhanced strategic autonomy and resilience of the EU. Consequently, we need to increase expenditures for defence investments, emphasizing cutting edge technology, while achieving joint efforts and avoiding overlapping and duplication of efforts between the Member States. The above can be accomplished by the full exploitation of tools like PESCO and EDF. In addition, we need to ensure that the financial regulations of the EU reflect appropriate consideration of the external threats and challenges to Europe, and thus do not hinder the development of a genuine and effective common defence and security policy.



## **Greek Defence News: What are your plans on fighting corruption and proceeding to investigations on defence procurements that have been approved by previous governments?**

This government considers transparency and accountability as the main pillars of the entirety of its political agenda. Naturally, this includes the sensitive sector of national defence. Every mismanagement or corruption case that surfaces is investigated in accordance with the Ministry's internal procedures and the directions provided by the independent judiciary.

## **Greek Defence News: Which is the status of the Greek-USA military cooperation?**

The strategic defence cooperation between Greece and the USA is at an excellent level. Greece is the main partner of the United States in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean. As the Prime Minister underlined during his historic recent address to the US Congress, this state of affairs is the result not just of common strategic priorities, but also of shared values and a shared history. The high level of alignment between the two countries was reflected in the recent five-year extension of the Mutual Defence Cooperation Agreement (MDCA) and its ratification by the Hellenic Parliament. This milestone agreement ensures a welcomed increase of the US military footprint in our country, especially in the sensitive areas of Alexandroupoli and Souda Bay, but also at Stefanovikeio and Larissa. In addition, it will provide added value to the Armed Forces of both countries by facilitating joint exercises and will stimulate economic growth through American investments in infrastructure projects of common interest. I believe we have every reason to be optimistic and confident about the future of relations between Athens and Washington, in the field of defence and beyond.

## **Greek Defence News: What is the ministry's strategy for developing the Greek-Russian military and defence industry cooperation at the timing where USA, EU and NATO are strongly opposed to the Russian foreign policy towards Ukraine?**

Let me be frank: President Putin's unprovoked and unjustified decision to invade Ukraine undermined the possibility of any cooperation between Greece and the Russian Federation in the field of defence for the foreseeable future. On the contrary, Greece, as a core part of the West, supports the comprehensive packages of sanctions, including the military and defence sectors, adopted by the EU with the aim to weaken the Kremlin's ability to prosecute its war of aggression. Despite the historic and cultural ties between our two peoples, I cannot

imagine the development of military cooperation between Greece and Russia, until Moscow puts an end to this brutal and reckless invasion and commits to respecting Ukraine's integrity, sovereignty and independence. That is, after all, not only the solemn duty of everyone who believes in Western values, but also our obligation towards the Greek minority in Ukraine.

### **NIKOLAOS CHARDALIAS**

#### **DEPUTY MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE**



He was born on 10 November 1968 in Vironas and he is a native of Granitsa, Evrytania.

He is a distinguished graduate of Varvakeios School.

He has studied Political Sciences and International Relations at KENT University, England, and specialised in Regional Development and European Integration.

He served in the Air Force (1996-1998).

He has been Mayor of Vironas for 3 four-year terms (2003-2014), President of Imittos Protection and Development Association-SPAY (2003-2014), as well as President of the Civil Protection Committee of the Central Union of the Municipalities of Greece-KEDE (2006-2012), Executive Secretary of Central Greece Region (2014-2016) and Attica Regional Elected Councilor (2014-2019).

He has also been Secretary General of Civil Protection from 19 July 2019 to 16 March 2020 and Deputy Minister of Civil Protection and Crisis Management from 17 March 2020 to 31 August 2021, with the latter being the date of his appointment as Deputy Minister of National Defence.

He is married to Ms Panagiota Panagiotopoulou, a Physical Education Professor, graduate of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Science (Athens TEFAA) and has two daughters, Ioanna and Dimitra.

He speaks English and French.