

**Speech of the Greek Prime Minister
and President of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK)
Mr Costas Simitis
in the Council of the Socialist International
(Buenos Aires, 24-25 June 1999)**

Shaping change : the new agenda

We live in turbulent and yet challenging times. On the eve of the twenty-first century, the world is changing in such a rapid way that is becoming intellectually more and more difficult to comprehend it. The world is quickly becoming a "global village". What some may consider a tired cliché now has substance and meaning. We see a world unfolding that should allow us to touch each neighbourhood through the magic of global information system and new technologies that supersede frontiers. In this world, integration and globalization go unfortunately hand in hand with fragmentation, state disintegration, economic dislocation, social deprivation, marginilization, ethnic, sectarian and religious conflicts. Ethnic conflict is clearly widespread and in some areas , not least in Europe, as the case of Kosovo testifies, has increased in intensity and ferocity in recent years

It is a world that gives rise to new risks, new threats, new challenges but it is also a world of new opportunities that sees democratic ideals, values and government spreading, investment and trade increasing, a world that sees new countries like Brazil, China, Argentina, Russia, S. Africa, India and others, emerging as major players in the economic, political and environmental scene. Thus, far from seeing the "end of history" as some proclaimed some years ago, we are witnessing a new historical dynamics shaping the world. In this world, new linkages are formed and new networks of exchanges are established, networks which are at times mutually beneficial and at times mutually disruptive.

Inevitably, this produces resistance from those who see themselves disadvantaged, marginalized or left behind in the process of structural adjustment driven by globalization and rapid technological progress. Globalization is often and rightly so blamed for unemployment, income inequality, de-industrialization, environmental degradation and marginalization of countries, societies and peoples.

And yet globalization could not and should not be reversed. A reversal could lead down to a road or deeper global fragmentation with adverse effects for prosperity and political stability.

Given that, our task, as socialists, must be to seek to "shape change", to harness, that is, the forces of globalization in order to set out a new global agenda and new strategies aiming at:

(i) promoting "good governance" based on democratic principles, respect of fundamental human and minority rights, civil, multicultural society and effective, fair, decentralized and accountable governmental, political and administrative institutions. Human rights must be seen as an interdependent and interrelated whole comprising not only civil and political rights but also economic, social and cultural rights.

(ii) building a new economic, financial and political system of global governance that would better reflect present realities in the international distribution of economic power, resources, wealth and patterns of influence. This system must be based on the principles of international law, cooperation and has as its core institution the United Nations (UN) and the primacy of international legitimacy.

(iii) generating the conditions and environment for sustainable economic and social development that puts the needs of ordinary citizens first. Combating poverty, ensuring the supply of basic services, health, education, agricultural development, basic infrastructures, demographic policies must be among the top priorities of the new developmental agenda.

(iv) ensuring equitable distribution of wealth, resources and above all knowledge and information as the indispensable factors underpinning economic and social progress.

(v) strengthening the free and open multilateral trade system while controlling the disruptive consequences of erratic capital movements that have produced so much economic dislocation lately.

(vi) accelerating and consolidating the integration of the developing countries into the global economic, financial and institutional system.

(vii) forging a new cultural synthesis that, while preserving distinct cultural identities, would negate the fanatical fundamentalist movements of all sorts and confound the advocates of the "clash of civilization" theories.

In advancing such an agenda, we, socialists, ought to avoid giving the impression that we are attempting to impose our values, norms or pattern of governance upon other societies.

Those of us who come from Europe and who also happen to belong to the European Union, have a double obligation. We must not only struggle within the Union to ensure that its complex mechanisms and its decision making process do not become impersonal and undemocratic. We must also ensure that the EU, as producer of stability, security and prosperity, play its appropriate role in world politics. We cannot afford, as members of the most successful regional organization in history, and certainly as socialists, to turn away from those who live or have lived in totalitarian, authoritarian or despotic systems, and those who must spend their entire lives trying to

secure enough food for themselves and their families.

As socialists and as members of the EU, we must take the initiative on a number of fronts. First, we must devise the means and the logistics for preventive political actions on a collective basis - regionally or globally - to deal with and effectively counter the root causes of the problems that bedevil the world. Atavism, hyper-nationalism, ethnic conflicts and civil wars are there and must be dealt with. But they are symptoms. The root causes are abject poverty, injustice, inequality and disrespect for human dignity. Within the European Union we are credibly demonstrating that we can address these issues. We must do more within the Union and beyond it. And as socialists we pledge to do more. The wealth of the E.U. must be used to generate wealth beyond our borders and beyond our immediate neighborhood.

The second front that we, as socialists within the EU must act on, is with respect to international security. Over a long period of time, we have established a security community in most of Europe. In the post-World War II era, we can empirically demonstrate the growing non-utility of the use of force and of the threat of use of force in our state-to-state relations. In Europe, we gave up conflict for cooperation. In most of Europe, we have demonstrated that we can "escape from history". The war in Kosovo has, nonetheless reminded us that the danger of regression is ever present.

Therefore it behooves us as socialists to act within the EU and to use the political and economic power of our Union to strengthen international

institutions and organizations, particularly the peacekeeping and peacemaking mechanisms of the United Nations.

For all, its faults, a lot of which are not its own, the United Nations is the only body that enjoys world-wide legitimacy. We must work to strengthen its mechanisms, complement them where necessary, establish new ones by consensus, but we must work with them and not against them. Otherwise we run the danger of delegitimizing a system without which the post-World War II world might have turned quite differently. The United Nations has always provided, at minimum, a safety valve – most recently during the Kosovo crisis. Shaping change, at the end, means changing our ways. Above all this means changing our habits and our way of thinking. It was not too long ago, when Central and Latin America was synonymous with dictatorial and authoritarian governments, all flagrant abuses of human rights. In the last two decades, however, there has been a sea change in this region of the world – so far away yet so close to us culturally and otherwise. The most notable change, with positive results everywhere to be seen, has been the turn towards democratic governance and impressive development. Democracy is not really a form of government. It is above all an idea. Change comes with ideas. In the end ideas and not violence are the mid-wives of history. Dictatorships are imposed. Democracies are chosen. In democratic societies the rule of law, enforced by independent judiciaries prevails. Above all democratic societies are based on the informed consent of the people.

The big challenge facing the world of the 21st century is the danger of new divides between luxury and misery, between rich and poor, between the haves and the have nots. We cannot afford to live in such a world, and therefore have the obligation to change it, as individuals and as members of the Socialist International. We must harness our ideas and marshal our strength and our resources so that the world of tomorrow is not one of division, conflict and despair, but one of unity, reconciliation and hope.