

# GREEK PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICIAL VISIT

## Simitis' visit to boost relations with Japan

By Elias Katsareas

Greek Ambassador to Japan

The arrival of Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis in Japan today on his first official visit is of great importance to relations between the two countries.

Simitis has worked methodically and patiently to include Greece in the European Union, achieving this goal early this year.

The prime minister's visit highlights the significance we attribute to our relations with Japan, as well as our desire to see these relations expanded and deepened for the benefit of both countries.

It is also an excellent opportunity for me to communicate with the people of Japan and convey to them the greetings and best wishes of the people of Greece.

Our two countries, though separated by a great geographical distance, share the common values of attachment to democracy, civil and individual freedoms, in addition to the respect of human rights and the rule of law.

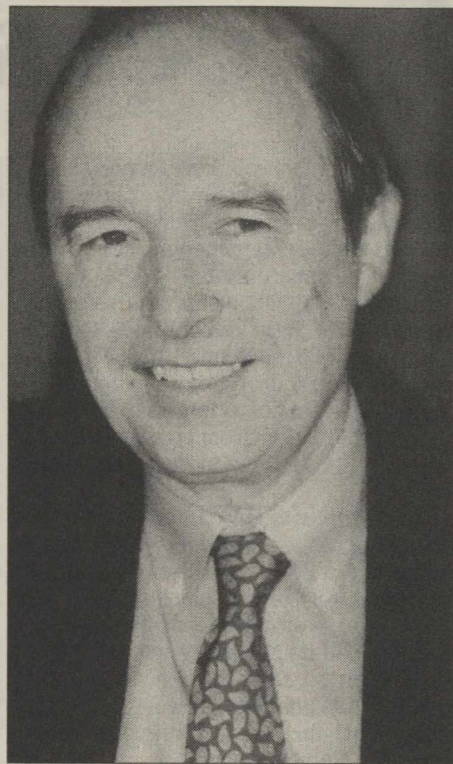


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Both of our countries are open societies with market economies and are heirs of old and important civilizations.

We realize that the challenges of globalization, new technologies and the constantly changing world environment should be managed for the benefit of people, in the sense of the humanist tradition, and be harnessed to serve the new emergencies of world poverty, social exclusion, deterioration of the environment, disease, drug traffic and international crime.

Greece and Japan welcome the recent adoption in Brussels of the EU-Japan 10-year Joint Action Plan as well as the Declaration Against Terrorism as important documents that make significant contributions to international peace and security.



Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis

As both Greece and Japan share an attachment to the principles of international law and the respect of international treaties and covenants, it is no wonder that their positions converge on many international issues.

This broad framework and the commonality of values constitute the foundation on which Mr. Simitis and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi confidently can build on an already vibrant relationship.

In addition, the fact that both Mr. Simitis and Mr. Koizumi have an ambitious and bold reform agenda for the economies and societies of their respective countries make all of us very keen and hopeful in looking forward to their meeting and exchanges.

In conclusion, I would like to convey best wishes for the health and prosperity to the Emperor, Empress and members of the Imperial Family as well as the government and the people of Japan from the president, the government and the people of Greece.

## Greece—where myth meets reality

By Thanos Kafopoulos

First Secretary of the Greek Embassy

Greece is a country of 11 million people in southeastern Europe, about 10,000 kilometers from Japan.

At the same time, however, Greece is an idea of ecumenical appeal that warms the heart of many often rendering the concept of distance obsolete.

One very distinctive yet ecumenical element of Greece is its language. Greek is the mother of the European languages, be it Latin (Western) or Cyrillic (Russian). What is more, the Greek language has not changed significantly since antiquity.

Around 800 B.C., Greeks began colonizing the Mediterranean basin establishing new cities as far away as Marseille in today's France.

Through this process the Greek alphabet was disseminated to southern and northern Europe.

Then in about A.D. 1000, during the peak of the Byzantine Empire, two monks from the northern region of Macedonia, Cyril and Methodios, introduced an adapted version of the Greek alphabet to the Slavs in eastern and central Europe.

Another worldwide value associated with Greece is the institution of democracy, which reached maturity in ancient Athens in the fifth century B.C.

The word is derived from the Greek words "demos" (people) and "kratos" (state or power), and means "power of the people."

In ancient Athens, democracy took almost 100 years to reach perfection. In modern Greece, we went through a similar process.

Having undergone seven years of military rule between 1967 and 1974, the Greek people revolted against the military regime and established a genuine and vibrant democracy that has functioned until today.

A third Greek, yet at the same time

global, institution is the Olympic Games, which began in Greece in 776 B.C. and was held every four years in Olympia.

In fact the ancient Greek calendar begins with the first Olympic Games, and historians place the beginning of Greek recorded history at precisely that time.

What is more, the first modern Olympic Games were staged in Athens in 1896. In antiquity the Olympic champions were awarded a plain olive branch, a sign of peace and virtue, and were received by their city-states as national heroes.

To exalt the strength of the victor, part of the city-walls were symbolically brought down to show that the city of such valiant citizens had no need of artificial defenses. Also a voluntary Olympic Truce was established by which hostilities between city-states ceased during the Games.

The Olympic Truce tradition is being revived in our times by Greek Foreign Minister George Papandreou through the International Olympic Committee, which will call upon all combatants to cease hostilities during the Athens 2004 Games.

This may sound highly idealistic. Nonetheless, if the ancient Greeks could do it, why can't modern humanity live up to ancient practice?

Greece and Japan are not brought together only by the ecumenical appeal of Greek values.

Through their respective archipelagos (a Greek word meaning Main Sea), Greece and Japan provide the world with great sailors that have tirelessly sailed the world.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Greece and Japan together own about 30 percent-35 percent of the world shipping fleet, and that they share similar views on the Law of the Sea having both ratified the Jamaica Convention of 1982 recognizing the concept of the archipelago and the rights of states built therein.

Furthermore, Greeks, like Japanese,



The Acropolis, which overlooks Athens, draws tourists from around the world.

are well-known for their hospitality, or philoxenia in Greek.

Just like in Japan, the Greek household since antiquity has been open to strangers, reserving for them the best possible treatment.

What is more, the Greek family, just like the Japanese, remains the backbone of society, providing a safety net for young people who may find it difficult to obtain good employment or feel challenged by pressures of modern life.

Greece and Japan also share similarities in the economic field. Having emerged from World War II in ruins, they have achieved a great deal through the hard work of their people.

From 1950 to 1980, Greece and Japan were the fastest growing economies in the free world, with annual growth rates

in excess of 8 percent.

In 1950, Greece was one of the poorest countries in Europe.

But since 1998, it has ranked among the 25 most advanced nations in the world in terms of the U.N. index on human development. Twenty years after Greece joined the European Union in 1981, the country entered the European Monetary Union.

In this respect, progress has been spectacular, with the annual growth rate exceeding 4 percent, and the country is on a steeply upward path toward full convergence with the EU average.

All in all, Greece is an idea. Greece is a country. For us Greeks, it is both. We can only hope that you will wish to learn more about the place where myth meets reality in a very harmonious way.