

Αρχείο
Λόγοι
Ιαπωνία

ΙΑΠΩΝΙΑ: ΣΧΕΔΙΟ ΟΜΙΛΙΑΣ ΠΡΩΘΥΠΟΥΡΓΟΥ

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

I am very happy to be here with you tonight. Europe and Japan are two of the oldest societies in the world. They share cultures that have produced literature, art and philosophy. Their influence has shaped the lives of people over centuries. They also share a common attachment:

- to freedom and democracy,
- to the rule of law and human rights,
- to market principles and the promotion of free trade,
- to security, peace and stability in the world,
- to the eradication of poverty.

Europe and Japan share the present and future. They are participants in a world that is changing and becoming united. Globalization is a process that continues. The revolution in information technology is one of the factors for the pronounced change that we are currently observing.

However, there are also area-specific forces behind the large impetus for change. In Europe, the European

Union is “coming of age” with sectors of the European economies increasingly integrating into a single and seamless whole.

Two years ago in Lisbon, we set an ambitious agenda for economic and social renewal. We set the goal to make Europe the most competitive region in the world, with full employment social cohesion. This agenda was supplemented a year ago in Stockholm, with a sustainable development strategy. The goal is to fully integrate the environmental dimension into our social and economic policy reform agenda.

We have also begun a process of enlargement of the European Union to the East and South of the European continent. This process is well on track. It is irreversible and imminent. It will bring about fundamental developments.

Japan has been a country of miraculous change. The emergence of Japan in the post-war world is an extraordinary story. It is an example that researchers carefully studied. It found its way to textbooks. Other countries tried to follow the Japanese example.

Since its post-war recovery, the Japanese economy has weathered many storms. For example:

- trade and capital liberalization in the high-growth years
- the two oil crises;
- yen appreciation;
- the bubble-economy years,
- and the subsequent collapse of the bubble, whether it is the stock market or the real estate market.

It is no secret, though, today that the economic model, which served Japan so well during the past decades, has outlived its usefulness. Change is inevitable, and I am convinced that Japan is committed to its rebirth.

In the Japan-USA-EU triangle, the Japanese-European axis has to be strengthened. We know how to do business with each other, and this relation can be expanded. Nevertheless, we should also expand our political cooperation, both on the EU and the bilateral Greek-Japanese level.

In our efforts to promote prosperity, peace and stability on the European continent, a vital ingredient is the health of our own economy. During the recent global slowdown, it appears that the EU economy also went

through a significant slowdown but did not slip into a major recession.

Greece is an EU member since 1981 and, an EMU member since Jan. 1st, 2001. Among EU countries, it continues to draw attention and praise for its marked progress. It is the Greek economy's remarkable turnaround performance during the second half of the 1990s that made EMU membership possible for the country.

The euro has been successfully launched and is the European Union's single currency today. Greek citizens showed a great deal of enthusiasm, immediately adopting the new currency. The successful changeover is an indication of the flexibility and adaptability of Greeks to changing environments.

For the past six years, Greece's economy is growing at rates above the EU average. In 2001, the Greek economy grew twice as fast as the EU average, at a rate of 4.1%. This was due to high investment rates, which more than counterbalanced the negative influence of the significant slowdown of the world and EU economies.

The Greek economy is the strongest economy in the Balkan Peninsula. // Greece is actively involved in the reconstruction of the economies of the previous Soviet countries of its neighborhood. / This involvement is both political and economic. / It carries at both the public and the private sector level.

Greece is the only EU country in the Balkan Peninsula. // Therefore, it has a prominent role to play: that of the stabilizing force in South East Europe and the Middle East. / Greece is actively pushing these countries to make the necessary reforms so that they will be able to eventually join the European Union.

Greek private investments into the Balkan countries are also very large, ranking at the top when compared to other countries' investments in the Balkans. // Greek SMEs, financial institutions and entrepreneurs are creating thousands of jobs in the Balkan countries. / These countries are currently going through, / often unpopular and painful / macroeconomic stabilization programs and face acute unemployment problems. / Additionally, Greece is hostess to hundreds of thousands of immigrants.

Many European and other foreign firms prefer to enter the Balkan area jointly with a Greek company because Greeks understand the culture, the mentality and the economic system of these countries.

Greece is the preferable location for many foreign companies' headquarters, which wish to do business in the region. This region includes the Balkans and the Middle East. Greece is attractive because it enjoys:

- a stable political system,
- a stable economic environment,
- a population, which is highly educated and speaks foreign languages
- an infrastructure in telecommunications and transportation, which is up to Western European standards and vastly improving.
- a bureaucracy, which is being minimized gradually, making it easier for business to operate.

All these factors also make Greece an attractive country to invest.

Today, Greek economic policy is the same as European economic policy. Greece strives to quickly close the gap in living standards with the European Union, and the European Union strives to quickly close the gap

with the United States of America. Both efforts are in the same direction. Hence, they require the same policy. This policy is encapsulated in the Lisbon goals that I mentioned earlier. / I will give you a few examples.

Deregulation and structural reforms is one example. In all European Member-States, important economic deregulation measures are under way. / All sectors are affected, such as telecommunications, energy, transport, the financial markets, or the labor market. / We believe that these measures will further support economic growth and will contribute to the creation of a large number of quality jobs.

In Greece, structural reforms have also been a top priority for the government's agenda. / We make concerted efforts towards

- market liberalization and increased competition,
- the modernization of the public administration,
- pension reform and the redesign of the tax system.

The simplification of our tax system will make it more transparent and equitable. The aim is to

- enhance the international competitiveness of Greek companies,

- achieve a permanent increase in productivity growth,
- integrate gradually the underground economy,
- and, of course, increase the attractiveness of our country as an investment destination for foreign capital, and for entrepreneurs like the Japanese.

Another prominent example of common European policy is the eEurope initiative. This is an EU-wide promotion of the digital society. By and large, it served as the much anticipated wake-up call. We managed to bring the Internet into schools, public administration and into people's homes.

The eEurope initiative created a powerful dynamic that placed the Internet on top of the political agenda in all our countries. We all understand that sustained gains in productivity necessitate investing in education and human capital formation, the development of digital skills, the availability of lifelong-learning opportunities, social inclusion in the knowledge society we are helping create.

It is too early to assess the progress made towards achieving the Lisbon goals. Progress may not yet be sweeping, but we have made significant steps in the right direction.

The second major policy issue at a European Level is Enlargement. This is a major historic event, bringing in countries that have long been cut off behind the Iron Curtain. The EU is preparing to embrace ten new Member States from the former Eastern Bloc, in addition to Cyprus and Malta.

The enlargement process makes Europe a safer place for its citizens and contributes to conflict prevention and control in the wider world.

However, it is not only the candidate countries that have to prepare for EU's enlargement. The European Union itself has to modernize its institutions, make them open, efficient, citizen-oriented and more lightly regulated. Institutions such as the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament are all subject to comprehensive reforms. They were designed in the 1950s for a European Community of six Member-States and not of twenty-eight or more, as will soon be the case with the Union.

The economic benefits of our enlargement process will be widespread and will not be contained to Europe. Our main trading partners, Japanese businesses for

instance, should enjoy the single currency, single tariff and single set of administrative procedures applying to the goods and services freely flowing in and out of the enlarged Union of approximately 500 million consumers! / The business potential for the entrepreneurs of the world economy is enormous. /

Dear friends,

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Greece, Europe and Japan are being brought together by the process of globalization. / This is a process, whose characteristics we can define, / by taking the right initiatives. / We have done a lot, / but a lot more remains to be done. / I am optimistic that we are moving in the right direction.

Thank you very much for your attention.

(1.600 λέξεις)