

KINA - ΣΧΕΔΙΟ ΟΜΙΛΙΑΣ ΠΡΩΘΥΠΟΥΡΓΟΥ

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

I am honored to be here with you tonight. As I am prepared to briefly describe my country and some of the opportunities for mutual cooperation and partnerships, I cannot resist the temptation to highlight some evident links between Greece and China.

Obviously, the size of our respective countries and populations is not one of the common aspects we share! Greece is a small country in the Balkan Peninsula, at the Southeastern part of Europe, with several thousands of islands on the Aegean Sea and approximately 11 million inhabitants. This is less than the people that leave in and around Beijing.

However, both Greece and China are countries with an important cultural heritage. Both Athens and Beijing are capitals of old civilizations.

Both of our economies have witnessed a small miracle: For Greece, the significant turnaround in the economy contributed mostly to the joining the Economic and Monetary Union of Europe at the beginning of this year. For China, success has been even more dramatic. In the past two

decades, the economy grew at an average rate of 10% per annum and the volume of trade at a steady 15%. As a result, the Chinese GDP per capita quadrupled in less than twenty years.

In the tradition of the ancient Olympics, Athens will be holding the 2004 Olympic Games, while Beijing is a strong contestant for hosting the 2008 Games.

Our two nations are making strides in the right direction, a direction of economic prosperity, social inclusion and social justice, with considerable success and with a lot to learn from each other. Both Greece and China share the vision of justice and equality in solidarity. Indeed, we both strive to spread the benefits of progress and development equally across our people.

Greece has been a member of the European Union since 1981 and, as of the beginning of this year, is the 12th member of the European Monetary Union (EMU). This is a currency union formed by European Union Member States at the beginning of 1999.

In EMU, the pursuit of price stability is in the hands of the European Central Bank, who is in charge of the conduct of the monetary policy. The euro is the official currency of the countries forming EMU. It will circulate in notes and coins, in approximately six months from now, on January 1st of 2002.

The European Single Market guarantees free mobility of goods, labor and capital within the EU. The Growth and Stability Pact as well as the wide-spread use of the Open Method of Coordination for National Action Plans have set the stage for a stable macroeconomic environment and a strategy to promote growth and social inclusion. European Union rules and regulations are fully incorporated into Greek law.

The Greek economy's remarkable turnaround performance during the second half of the 1990s made EMU membership possible for the country. For the past six years, our economy is growing at rates above the EU average. This year, Greece is expected to grow at least twice as fast than the EU, at a rate of approximately 4.5%. Of course, this rate of growth is nowhere near the 7.2% of the Chinese economy.

Investment is the main driver of growth in Greece, a trend that we are certain to see continuing throughout the entire decade. The forecasted rapid increase in investment is expected to originate from:

- the currently low levels of interest rates,
- the significantly-decreased cost of borrowing due to sound fundamentals and EMU membership,

- the large inflow of funds from the EU, earmarked for specific investment projects, under the umbrella of the Community Support Framework
- the construction projects for the preparation for the Olympics of year 2004, which are well underway and should be completed in a timely and cost-effective manner.

Speaking of the Olympic Games, we understand that China is a strong candidate for the 2008 Olympics, with the decision taking place approximately a year from now. Beijing's plans for "Green Olympics", that is, high standards in environmental protection, and "Hi-tech Olympics" with increased application of new technologies, should make for an outstanding experience in the "People's Olympics". We feel that here too, there is room for increased cooperation and exchanges between the two countries.

Greece's appeal as a tourist destination through the years is, to a large extent, due to its many islands on the Aegean Sea. Indeed, in the rapidly increasing tertiary sector, tourism and transport services represent the most important share. Historically, tourism receipts offset the largest part of the chronic, yet sustainable, trade deficit in the balance of goods and services.

As a Mediterranean country, Greece is known for the production of certain agricultural products, such as fresh fruits, olives and olive oil, wine and tobacco. We import a large proportion of our energy requirements, virtually all transport equipment and large quantities of machinery and electrical goods. For the latter two categories of commodities, China is one of our main suppliers.

Greece's landscape is also responsible for its thousands of years of maritime tradition. Indeed, Greek shipping, both in terms of construction and services, has a long and illustrious history, a tradition of entrepreneurial excellence, blending business and trade with culture that goes back to antiquity.

Today, we continue to be a major carrier of world trade: one out of six tons of cargo carried by sea anywhere in the world is carried on Greek-owned ships. And as China is a trading giant with enormous shipping requirements, increased cooperation between the two countries in the area of maritime transport is definitely mutually beneficial.

Shipbuilding and ship repairing is another area of increased interest for the two countries: Chinese and Greek shipyards are busy building and repairing ships of all sizes, from all nations. It is my understanding that an increasing number of Greek orders are placed with Chinese shipyards,

in appreciation of the good craftsmanship and effort put into the new ships.

China's imminent entry into the World Trade Organization, after a long period of painstaking negotiations, should broaden the scope of the economic cooperation between our countries in existing as well as new areas of economic activity. With China as a member, WTO will finally become a truly global organization.

Naturally, WTO accession may also give rise to short-term challenges, mainly resulting from increased competition on a number of sectors of the economy. However, with the remarkable progress that your country has made during the past decades in economic reform, such difficulties will prove manageable and temporary.

Besides, I believe that the famous quote "markets are like parachutes, they function only when they are open" is quite appropriate for every country, Greece and China certainly not excluded. A good example in my country is the recent opening of the telecommunications and energy markets.

In fixed telephony, the Hellenic Telecommunication Corporation, or "OTE", whose shares are trading in the New York Stock Exchange, is the dominant monopoly. OTE has a strategic presence in South-Eastern Europe and is looking

for a strategic partner to help it achieve a global expansion. Soon, the State's ownership will be reduced to approximately 35%.

The domestic market opened up for additional operators, and seven licenses for wireless fixed telephony were granted amidst fierce competition. The benefits to the user are already evident: better quality services and lower prices, the advertised better-quality, lower-cost outcome.

In mobile telephony, there are three operators with a penetration rate over roughly 60%, and there is substantial interest and positive prospects for a fourth player in the market. Out of the three existing mobile operators, COSMOTE, a subsidiary company of the state-owned telecom OTE, has proven to be the most successful, taking the lead, despite the fact that it was the last to enter the market.

In the area of the third generation mobile telephony, an auction for the Universal Mobile Telephone Services licenses is to take place at the end of this month.

Progress is also being made in the liberalization of the energy sector. The results there are slower to materialize because the sector's liberalization began very recently. The basic thrust of our overall energy policy is to:

- (a) Increase competition in all major energy markets, that is electricity, gas and fuel.
- (b) Complete the huge investment in the distribution network for natural gas, which will allow residential use of this alternative, environmentally-friendlier, energy source.
- (c) Increase the efficiency of domestic as well as commercial energy uses.
- (d) Promote the use of renewable resources, whose share in total energy consumption is targeted to reach over 20% by year 2010.
- (e) Establish safe and efficient network links with Europe.

I should add that this year, the Public Power Corporation, the state-owned monopoly in the production and distribution of electricity, is going to be listed in the Athens Stock Exchange. The State will, therefore, sell a large chunk of its ownership to the public.

Our national strategy integrates well with the European Strategy for Energy in the new millennium, the latter being the main item of discussions of the Fourth EU-China Conference on energy cooperation, which took place only a few days ago. Issues such as new energy sources and especially renewable energy sources, supply safety, and

technology transfer were brought to the forefront of the discussions, and rightly so.

It is also my understanding that your government has earmarked a considerable amount of money for the integrated ecosystem assessment of the western region of the country. And as my government is working hard to find concrete measures and actions to implement the sustainable development strategy, I believe that we have both a lot to do together, in this direction. Future generations have a right to a quality living environment, and this fundamental right will be respected.

That brings me to an important message from the recent meeting of the Heads of State of the European Union countries that I would like to share with you, as it is a message for all the people of this world. A couple of years ago, Greece and its EU partners set in Lisbon a strategic goal for the European Union. The goal is to make Europe a competitive and dynamic, knowledge-based economy, capable of sustained, non-inflationary economic growth with more and better jobs for its people, greater economic cohesion, less poverty and more social inclusion.

What is at stake is twofold:

- (a) A concerted effort towards the goal of an electronic Europe, of a socially inclusive, citizen-empowered digital

society. An information-society in which all citizens will be able to actively participate and, thus, reap the benefits of the digital revolution.

- (b) A strategy for growth and development that will meet the needs of the present generation without compromising those of future generations.

Both are fundamental objectives that I believe both our countries share. It is Europe's commitment to the world strategy of sustainable development that was reaffirmed a few days ago in Goteborg, Sweden, during the latest Council of the Heads of State. The economic, social and environmental dimensions of development are the three sides of the same triangle and hence, should be mutually reinforced.

Is important to stress here the significant economic opportunities that clear, stable and coherent objectives in the implementation process of the sustainable development strategy present. Such an approach can unleash a new wave of technological innovation and investment that will fuel growth and employment. With the use of new, environmentally friendly, technologies in sectors such as energy and transport, we can be successful in decoupling economic growth from resource use. In other words, we can achieve a less environment-intensive growth for our

countries and the world as a whole. This is a major component of the sustainability dimension of the growth we want for the EU countries. And it is my understanding that we have China's wholehearted support.

Your country is a major recipient of foreign direct investment from Europe in the form of various cooperation programs, which are not always designed optimally. The major stumbling block seems to be the lack of synergies between the EU and individual Member States' cooperation programs, as well as between the EU and other international financing institutions' programs. A better integration and coordination of joint efforts on not only a large budget, but also on small and visible projects, such as student and cultural exchanges through scholarship programs and visitors' programs, will certainly improve the efficiency of the activities between our countries.

My dear friends,

Our two countries share a common vision for a world in which poverty is wiped out, disease is eradicated, human rights are respected, the environment is protected, and education and technology are easily accessible to all citizens.

We want to build inclusive societies, and we have the opportunity to join forces in this aim. We can come close to our goals by enhancing further our economic, political and cultural ties. This is not a rhetorical wish. After all, distances in today's electronic world have shrunk. The world is becoming increasingly smaller.

I am optimistic about the future of our respective countries, about the future of the world in general. Because I believe we will achieve the goals we have set.

Thank you very much.

(2.200 λέξεις)