

PRESS OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

MESSAGE BY THE PRIME MINISTER COSTAS SIMITIS ON THE OCCASION OF THE 62nd THESSALONIKI INTERNATIONAL TRADE FAIR

For sixty two years the Thessaloniki International Trade Fair has accurately played the role of gauge of the economic and cultural progress of our country and of its prospects. It has also earned the status of show case for the promotion of economic activity and the productive potential of the country. It allows us simultaneously to exhibit Greek products and to underline the role that Thessaloniki can play as a commercial and industrial point of contact between the European Union and the countries of Southeastern Europe.

It is our confident expectation that this year's Fair will be an all-round success. The Fair cannot but reflect the successful course of the Greek economy and the bright prospects for development and prosperity of our country. The achievements of Greek production will be on exhibit at this year's Fair. It is those achievements that together make up the dynamic image of Greek production and point to its potential in the emerging competitive environment.

Important steps have been taken in the last few years to attain the conditions that will allow our society and our country to function efficiently and to pursue its interests in Europe and the world from a stronger position. Greece today is becoming stronger every day. During a time of instability, uncertainty and difficulties Greece has evolved into a major growth pole in the Balkans. Our economic record has led to the creation of new comparative advantages for the Greek economy as a place of monetary, institutional and political stability and as an investment destination.

We are on the road to success because we are following a consistent long-term economic policy. We are determined to secure economic stabilisation, development and competitiveness of our economy. To pursue decisive structural reforms affecting its everyday operation. We are working towards these goals methodically, systematically and with a clear view of the long term objectives.

The first fruits of our efforts are already visible. The higher rates of growth, the steady downward path of inflation, the reduction of the public sector deficit and the fall of interest rates are all characteristic examples. We can safely claim that we are going through the most satisfactory period for our economy since 1974.

These developments give rise to optimism, but in no case should they lead to complacency. Today it is generally accepted that European societies are facing new conditions necessitating a new outlook, and new strategic directions. If attitudes do not change, the problems will not be dealt with and will only become worse.

It is for this reason that we are persisting in our efforts. In the coming years we must put in practice an extensive, difficult and many-faceted programme. We must secure the preconditions of participation of Greece in the last phase of Economic and Monetary Union. We are obliged to pursue radical structural reforms which will accelerate growth and will shape the conditions so that we can meet the intensifying competitive pressures in the international economic and political scene. We are duty bound to lead the country towards a development path with a higher standard of living for all, to create a society with cohesion, confidence and prospects.

These challenges do not concern the Government alone. They concern all of us. In order to meet the requirements of the times, to move towards a new period for economic activity and social progress, towards an era when Greece will be strong and prospering, all of us must contribute. We have this duty towards Greece. We have a duty towards future generations.

This year's T.I.F. will be an authoritative mirror of the steps being taken and of the dynamic course for the future, as it has done ever since its first steps .

I wish the Fair every success. I am certain that it will once more surpass even our most optimistic expectations.