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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT AND PRIME MINISTER SIMITIS OF GREECE
TO THE GOVERNMENT OF GREECE, BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Inter-Continental Hotel
Athens, Greece

3:15 P.M. (L)

PRIME MINISTER SIMITIS: Mr. President, President Clinton. President Stephanopoulos has made an effort to achieve a different, a new level of economic performance and operation for its economy. Stability and development are the two trades of our economy. Social justice is the beacon of our economic policy. Thanks to these kinds of performance, Greece is now in a position to cope, in a different way, with its relations with the rest of the world.

Economic weakness, recession, under-development are linked to dependence and submission. We have realized successfully the challenge of our destiny to be determined by ourselves and no one else. We attribute to our independence, substance and meaning by doing away gradually with the gap that characterized Greece in relation to the remaining European Union. We forged one more ties with other countries, and the United States -- the economic presence, the presence of the United States of America in this country has played and still plays a tremendous role.

This policy in the economic field combines with a steady

effort to achieve stability and peace and cooperation in the region. First of all, in the European forum, the European Union, going beyond ethnic prejudice, securing thus the -- linking of countries between themselves, so isolationism, introvert tendencies or lack of action are not features of our policy. So peace and stability and cooperation in the Balkans means that the accession opposition belong to the past. This also means that our country should become the protagonist to overcome poverty, misery and other developments, which is a problem in the neighboring countries being the cause of ethnic dispute and migration.

The United States, thanks to the SECI initiative and thanks to the participation to the Stability Pact, steadily work in the same direction. But we also need to make additional efforts for political stability for forging stable borders in the area.

Peace and cooperation with Turkey means enforcement of international law and international treaties. The use of force, threats of war, the concept that everything could be negotiated, all this belong to an era before even the first World War. We have underlined this and also the United States of America have underlined the same.

We also want to participate to modern world, to the modern international community, have to use peaceful means to support their demands. We have to go to the International Court of Justice, as friendship requires, as friendship between peoples requires. Peace and cooperation in southeastern Mediterranean means that whenever we had war, disaster, aggression, injustices have to be

repaired, and the rule of international law should apply. Cyprus will be a source of tension for as long as justice is not enforced, for as long as international law is not enforced. I hope that the talks that will start will be substantive, as President Clinton said.

We do also hope that the European Union can play a role by opening new economic possibilities. European integration is supported by the United States. In an increasingly interlinked world, our participation to these interlinkages is a forced multiplier. It multiplies the force of our voice and our presence.

The European Union is a community of values, enforcing and abiding by these values should be the rule for all those who want to have relations with the European Union. Greece, thanks to this policy of peace, stability and cooperation has become a power of peace in the area. We cooperate in this effort with the United States, as we have cooperated in the past, and we will keep cooperating with the United States in the future.

This cooperation with the United States contributes to forging a more positive climate. We have already secured a different, new quality in the presence of Greece internationally. Our policies have secured a different quality, a new quality, as I said, to the presence of Greece in international forum.

President Clinton, who will address this audience, is a leader of a great country with which we are linked with traditional ties. But President Clinton is not only a leader, he's also a friend with whom we have already been able to discuss openly and sincerely all issues without any commitment. The President and his family – his spouse, his daughter – we know very well, do know and admire the history and the beauty of our country. They have friendly feelings for the Greek people and for Greece as a country, and we reciprocate these feelings.

The presence of President Clinton here underlines the continuing creative relationship we have and which we will still promote with the United States. We have large margins of improvement – not that we do not have good relations, we have excellent relations, but we can still improve them. We can multiply the common interests of our people by developing new activities, by taking advantage of the opportunities.

As an example, I will mention this: Greece and the United States of America have established a common – or joined counsel for a significant degree of cooperation, which we will undertake action in the Balkans. So we have opened a new course, a new road on top of what was already useful, of course, in the past – I mean the traditional business activity in the area. It's a new course that is founded on the acknowledgment of the fact that knowledge, technology, partnership, open borders do form and shape the new world. In this new world, Greece can walk with optimism, supported by the force that comes out of friendship and cooperation.

The President's presence here and his coming speech will reflect this fact. This friendship is of wider acceptance. It is with great pleasure that I welcome President Clinton in Greece. His visit reaffirms the traditional friendship that binds the two countries and the two peoples. But most importantly, in view to the future, the important is not the past, the important is the common belief that we have to work together for universal community of peace, for global community of peace. We have to work to strive for freedom and substantive democracy.

Thank you. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: President Stephanopoulos, Prime Minister Simitis, thank you for that fine speech. Mrs. Simitis, Mr. Mayor, ministers of the government, members of the opposition. To all the leaders of the church who are here, the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, distinguished citizens

of Greece, it is a great honor for all of us to be here. My wife and daughter, the Secretary of State, members of the White House, two members of the United States Congress, Representatives Kingston and Maloney.

And I should say that, as I did last night at the state dinner, I have in my entourage here ample evidence of the ties between our two countries. Not only the vast array of Greek American business people who have made this trip either to hold my hand or make sure I made no critical error – (laughter) – but also a group of people who have served me so well in the White House, beginning with my Chief of Staff John Podesta, my speechwriter Paul Glastriis who helped to prepare these remarks today. (Applause.) Elaine Shocas and Lisa Kountoupis. Those are just four of the many Greek Americans who have worked for me in the White House and, as I have often said, the Greek American community has been over-represented in the Clinton administration and America is better for it. (Applause.)

Early this morning in the wind and the rain I had the privilege of visiting the Acropolis. I was filled with a unique sense of awe, but also familiarity, perhaps because the setting has been described to me so often and so glowingly by my Greek American friends; perhaps because I studied the history of Athens and read Plato and Aristotle as a young man; perhaps because America has been so inspired and influenced by the ancient Greeks in everything from politics and philosophy to architecture.

For whatever reason, standing there in the rain on the Acropolis this morning, I was even more grateful for the deep ties of history, kinship and values that bind America and other freedom-loving nations to Greece – ties that prove the truth of Shelly's famous line, "Eimaste oli Ellines." We are all Greeks. (Applause.) We are all Greeks, not because of monuments and memories, but because what began here two and a half thousand years ago has at last, after all the bloody struggles of the 20th century, been embraced all around the world.

Today, for the first time in human history, more than half the world's people live under governments of their own choosing. Yet, democracy still remains a truly revolutionary idea. People still fight and die for it, from Africa to Asia to Europe. Its advance is still the key to building a better global society in this most modern of ages.

Another great civic virtue has its roots here in Athens – openness to the cultural differences among us that make life more interesting. In Thucydides account of his famous funeral oration, Pericles declares, "We lay Athens open to all and at no time evict or keep the stranger away." Two and a half thousand years later, Greece is still open to the world and we pray that everywhere in the world someday everyone will say, "We do not keep the stranger away." (Applause.)

Meanwhile, as all of you know, Greeks have made their way into every corner of the world and wherever they go they adapt to local culture yet retain immense pride in their traditions, their religion, their Hellenic identity. No nation has been more blessed by this phenomenon than the United States, with its vital and successful Greek American community. This is true in ways large and small. Last night at the State Dinner I had the opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of some of the most famous Greek Americans, those who achieved wealth and fame and power and influence.

But what I want to say today is that I am even more grateful that Greek Americans have enriched every single part and every single person in America. As a boy growing up in a small town in Arkansas, my very favorite place to eat with my father was the Pappas Brothers Cafe. And my very best friend for 45 years was a man named David Leopoulis who, after 45 years, still every single week sends me an email about Greece and Greek issues to make sure I don't stray too far from the fold. (Applause.)

The Prime Minister talked about the modern world in which we are living. I think it quite ironic that in this era of global markets and modern wonders, when more than half the world's people live in democracies for the first time in history, the world is still bedeviled by the oldest of human evils – the fear of the other, those who are different from us.

The clearest manifestation in modern times is the ethnic and religious hatred we see rampant, from Northern Ireland to the Middle East, to the tribal wars in Africa, to the Balkans. How much of our history has been shaped by the struggle between those who accept with self-confidence the interesting differences among people because they are strong enough to affirm the common humanity which is more important, and those who live their lives in constant fear or loathing of those who are different.

My wife had, a few weeks ago, to the White House two brilliant men for a conversation. One of them was the founder of the Internet, the other is one of the most distinguished American scholars of the study of the human genome, the gene structure. The biologist said nothing could have been discovered about the structure of the gene without the computer revolution; but that all this high technology had revealed an interesting fact: that all of us, all human beings, genetically are 99.9 percent the same.

And, furthermore, that if you take different groups of people – let's take the three most prominently here discussed – the Greeks, the Turks, the Irish – me – (laughter.) And if you put 100 Greeks, 100 Turks and 100 Irish in three different groups, the genetic differences among the individuals within each group would be greater than the genetic profile between the Greeks or the Turks or the Irish.

Isn't it interesting how many bodies have been piled up over human history because of that one-tenth of one percent difference, when we should have been embracing all along the 99.9 percent? Whether we take maximum advantage of the unparalleled promise of the new millennium depends in no small measure on whether we can find a way to get beyond that one-tenth of one percent difference to the common humanity that unites us all.

I've been thinking a lot about what unites Greeks and Americans. In 1821 when the Greeks rose to reassert their liberty, they captured the imagination of Americans. Thomas Jefferson wrote to the Greek patriot and scholar Adamantios Korais these words: "No people sympathize more freely than ours with the sufferings of your countrymen. None offer more sincere and ardent prayers to heaven for their success."

Of course, we were still a young country then, preoccupied with our own experiment in democracy, reluctant to involve ourselves in distant dangerous struggles. But thousands of ordinary Americans way back in 1821 sent money and supplies to Greece. A few actually sailed here and joined the freedom fighters, men like the brave Boston doctor Samuel Gridley Howe, and a black former slave from Baltimore, Maryland, named James Williams. Over a century later, when fascism seemed ready to crush the last embers of freedom in Europe, it was Greece which said "no," and handed the axis powers their very first major defeat in battle. America joined with Greece and the Allies and, together, we won a mighty victory.

Twice since World War II, battles between democracy and despotism have again been played out on Greek soil; each time, thank God, democracy emerged victorious. I have been thinking about that history today again in both its painful as well as its proud aspects. When the junta took over in 1967 here, the United States allowed its interests in prosecuting the Cold War to prevail over its interests – I should say, its obligation – to support democracy, which was, after all, the cause for which we fought the Cold War. It is important that we acknowledge that. (Applause.)

When we think about the history of Greece and the history of the United States, all the troubled ups and downs just of the last 50 years, it is easy to understand why some of those people who have demonstrated in the last few days have done so, and easy to understand the source of their passion. I can be glad as an American and as a free human being that they have the fundamental right to say their peace. If the people of every country, in the Balkans, for example, had the institutions and habits of democracy, if they, too, could proudly express and settle their differences peacefully and proudly and democratically, if the fundamental human rights of all those people were respected, there might not have been a war over Bosnia or Kosovo.

I've been thinking about all this because, of all the people in the world, surely the Greeks know best that history matters. We cannot understand the present unless we know history. On the other hand, we cannot move into the future if we are paralyzed by history.

In this era of historic sweeping change, we cannot afford paralysis. That was implicit in the Prime Minister's remarks. Surely, the Greeks demonstrate this every day as you build a bustling, modern economy with a booming stock market and one of the fastest growth rates in Europe, on the verge of joining the EMU. If there were Olympic gold medals for economic revival, Greece would surely get the very first one. (Applause.)

American companies and investors are taking notice that Greece clearly is on the right economic path. I believe we can do better and so, in the presence of all these business leaders today, I would like to make three modest proposals. First, I think we should double trade between our two countries in the next five years. Second, I ask Greek and American business leaders to match the money our government is putting into the Fulbright exchange program. (Applause.) And, third, I ask that one of these grants honor Yannis Kranidiotis, the gifted diplomat and former Fulbright Scholar. (Applause.) He was a great citizen, a great friend of the United States, who died with his son in a tragic accident while promoting peace in the Balkans. His life and work exemplify the positive, new role Greece has begun to play in this vital region of Europe.

The whole world is beginning to see Greece in a new light, no longer as one of Europe's poorest nations, but as southeast Europe's wealthiest nation — its beacon of democracy, a regional leader for stability, prosperity and freedom, helping to complete the democratic revolution that ancient Greece began — our long-held dream of a Europe undivided, free, and at peace for the first time in history.

And the remaining challenges to that long-held dream are all at play here in this region of Europe. The challenge of bringing stability, prosperity and full democracy to the Balkans. The challenge of creating a lasting peace in the Aegean, and genuine reconciliation between Greece and Turkey. The challenge of integrating a democratic Russia into Europe. The challenge of building bridges between and among the world's three great faiths which come together in Southeastern Europe — Islam and the Eastern and Western branches of Christianity. To finally create that Europe undivided, free and at peace, we must help this region meet five main challenges.

The first — and I would argue most urgent — is to stabilize Kosovo and the Balkans, and build the democratic institutions necessary so that all of the people of Kosovo can live in safety and freedom, including the Serbs of Kosovo.

I know there is still much anger and anguish in Greece about the course of action NATO took, and about the leadership role of the United States in that action. I do not expect to change what many here believe. But I must say what I believe. I believe we made the right decision, because at the end of this tumultuous century in which so much blood has been shed, at a moment when peace and democracy have triumphed almost everywhere else in Europe and increasingly throughout the

world, I do not believe we could have allowed an entire people to be exiled from their homes or extinguished from the Earth simply because of their ethnic heritage or how they worship God. I believe we had a moral and a strategic obligation to act, and that in acting we saved thousands of lives and enabled almost a million people to go home.

In Bosnia, where the world showed more reluctance and took four years to act, Mr. Milosevic and his allies killed a quarter of a million people, created 2.5 million refugees, and many of them still have not gone home.

In spite of our differences, I want to thank the Greek government for staying with its NATO allies during a crisis which was far harder on you than on any other country in our alliance. I want to thank you for getting aid to the civilians in Kosovo regardless of their ethnic backgrounds while the fighting raged. I want to thank you for committing resources to the reconstruction of Kosovo, just as you have contributed to the rebuilding of Bosnia and Albania.

Our work there is far from over. Together with the UN we must continue to build the democratic institutions that can provide safety and freedom to all the people of Kosovo. As we do, we can take pride in our troops from both countries serving together in the same sector to keep the peace holding.

Our second challenge is equally great. We have to strengthen the forces of democracy in Serbia and pave the way for Serbia's eventual integration into southeastern Europe and the European community as a whole. Greece can lead the revitalization of the economy and the political and civic life of southeastern Europe, but the work will never be complete until Serbia is a part of the process.

There is no reason this can not happen. The people of Serbia have a rich and noble history, a deep love of freedom, and a rightful place in the table of European unity. It is a tragedy they are not sitting at that table now, a tragedy that they have suffered and still suffer from fear and privation, an even greater tragedy that it might have all been so very different if not for the choices made by Mr. Milosevic. We may disagree about the best way to have responded to the action of this now indicted war criminal, but surely we can agree that the people of Serbia deserve better than to be suffering under the last living relic of Europe's dictatorial past.

That is why the international community must maintain pressure on Mr. Milosevic's regime, while also aiding the democratic aspirations of the Serbian people; why America has invested nearly \$12 million since July to promote a free press, independent labor unions, a pro-democracy network of non-governmental organizations in Serbia, on top of the \$25 million we have devoted to humanitarian aid there.

It is why we support the Serbian democratic opposition's call for early, fair and free elections, and why we support lifting entirely the fuel oil embargo and flight ban on Serbia as soon as those free and fair elections are held.

The third challenge we face together in creating a stable, prosperous and free Southeast Europe is to help every nation in the region build the institutions that make modern democracy thrive. As the only member both of NATO and the EU in Southeastern Europe, Greece is helping to guide this truly historic transformation. The Greek military is laying the foundations for peace through its role in southeastern Europe's multinational peacekeeping force and through NATO's Partnership for Peace. Greek companies are investing in the Balkans, creating jobs and higher living standards, and the rest of us must follow your lead.

The Greek government is leading the transformation of the region's economy, committing \$320

million for reconstruction of southeastern Europe and the rest of us must follow your lead if the Stability Pact is to have true meaning.

You are breaking down barriers to trade and transportation through the Southeastern Europe Cooperation Initiative and providing crucial seed capital through the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank. Thessaloniki is a city long known for its beauty and history. Now it is becoming known as the commercial hub of the Balkans. I am pleased that next month our government will open in Thessaloniki our office for Balkan reconstruction.

I have also asked the US-Greece Business Council to undertake an investment mission to the Balkans. (Applause.)

Finally, I am pleased to announce that our two governments will fulfill a dream of Prime Minister Simitis by giving Greek and American companies a chance to jointly apply their technical knowledge to the region's challenges, from cleaning up pollution on the Danube to wiring Balkan villages for the internet.

Our fourth challenge is to build a genuine reconciliation between Greece and Turkey. I know how much history lies behind that troubled relationship, but people in both nations are beginning to see the possibilities of forging a new and better future. The world will never forget the humanity Greeks and Turks displayed toward one another when the tragic earthquake struck you both in August, and then in Turkey again last week.

But this is more than just seismic diplomacy. For several months, Foreign Ministers Papandreou and Cem have been holding a dialogue on trade, tourism and the environment. Prime Ministers Simitis and Ecevit had an important meeting just two days ago. Greek and Turkish troops in NATO have joined together in a southeast Europe peacekeeping brigade. You are serving together now in Kosovo. Greece has taken bold steps. In many ways, these steps have been harder for Greece than for Turkey. But both sides are now showing the vision necessary to move forward.

I believe it is very much in your interest to see Turkey become a candidate for membership in the European Union, for that will reinforce Turkish secular, democratic, modernizing path, showing Turkey how much it has to gain by making progress on issues like Cyprus and the Aegean matters. (Applause.)

It will prove to Turkey that there is a place in Europe for a predominantly Muslim country as long as it respects the rights of its people — all its people, and advances the cause of peace. (Applause.) For many of these same reasons, we in the United States have also strongly supported the EU's decision to start accession talk with Cyprus.

Now, I know that many Greeks are anxious that if Turkey becomes a candidate for membership, the momentum in improving its relationship with Greece and actually solving these problems will slow. Having just spoken with President Demirel and Prime Minister Ecevit, I do not believe that will happen. But I can tell you this: I will do everything in my power to encourage both countries to continue building on the progress you have made. I am going to keep working hard to promote a just and lasting settlement in Cyprus. (Applause.) I am very pleased that, last Sunday, the parties in Cyprus accepted Secretary General Annan's invitation to start proximity talks, to prepare the ground for meaningful negotiations that would lead to a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem.

I hope these talks will bring us a step closer to lasting peace. I will keep pressing for a settlement that meets the fundamental interests of the parties, including real security for all Cypriots and an end to the island's division. (Applause.)

The status quo is unacceptable. (Applause.) I will say here only what I said in Turkey at every turn – before the Turkish National Assembly, before the business group, before earthquake survivors and in every private meeting: I think it is very good for the future of the world for Turkey to be integrated into Europe. But Turkey cannot be fully integrated successfully into Europe without solving its difficulties with Greece. We must put these behind us. (Applause.)

Our fifth and final challenge is to renew the old and profoundly important partnership between our two countries and our two peoples. We should promote more tourism, more cultural exchanges. We should continue in the United States to supply our NATO ally, Greece, with advanced weaponry. We should be working, together to fight global threats that know no borders, including the scourge of terrorism. Terrorists have struck within the borders of the United States; they have struck here claiming American and Greek lives. The American people and the Greek people deserve justice and the strongest possible efforts by our governments to end this menace. I am grateful that we are working more closely to do just that.

Let me say to you that as I have traveled this region first in Turkey and now here in Greece, it is impossible for me, as it would be for anyone, not to feel the weight of history on the decisions all of you face today. We are human. We can never wholly forget the injustices done to us, nor can we ever escape reminders of the mistakes we, ourselves, have made.

But it is possible to be shaped by history without being a prisoner to it. That, too, is a Greek idea. It was wise Demosthenes who said, "It is necessary to think of the future to enable us to set our ways straight."

Earlier this week in Istanbul, Hillary, Chelsea and I had the honor of visiting the Ecumenical Patriarch. My heart is still moved by that experience and by the beautiful gift that His All-Holiness, Patriarch Bartholomeos presented to me, a magnificent piece of parchment on which is written in Byzantine Greek lettering one of my favorite Bible passages, the first verse of the eleventh chapter of Hebrew: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen." (Applause.)

Elsewhere in the Bible is the marvelous verse, "Where there is no vision the people perish." Vision is to have faith and to imagine the things you hope for, and that faith is a real thing, unseen but real and tangible, more important than all the accumulated anxieties and wounds and worries and hurts, for it allows us to be human by going forward every day and looking toward a new tomorrow. With faith and sober realism, we can imagine a wonderful future for Greece, for Southeastern Europe, for this whole part of the world, one in which Greek and Turkish business people work together, from the Balkans to Central Asia. One in which Bosnians work across ethnic lines for a common economic and political future. One in which new democracies, from Slovenia to Romania to Bulgaria and, yes, to Serbia, meet the standards for entry into NATO and the European Union. One in which there is a Europe where everyone understands that being open and generous to those who are different does not diminish one's own identity, but enhances it. A Europe where everyone practices an ancient Greek trait still alive in Greece today – "filoxenia" – (applause) – one in which children can be raised to be proud of their heritage and proud of their faith without fearing or hatred – hating those who are different.

Soon, the world will have an opportunity to look at Greece, and many to come to Greece to participate in filoxenia, when they see Athens throw open the gates of the city to the Olympics in 2004. (Applause.) By then, I want all the world to see what we know today. Greece is a force for freedom, democracy, stability, growth, the dignity of the individual – assuming, yet, again, the ancient role of the Greeks – to inspire a more humane world.

Two thousand four isn't that far away, and we have a lot of work to do. But I have faith that we can do it. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

END 3:57 P.M. (L)