

AMBASSADE DE GRÈCE
EN BELGIQUE



REPRÉSENTATION PERMANENTE
DE LA GRÈCE
AUPRÈS DE L'UNION EUROPÉENNE

SERVICE DE PRESSE ET D'INFORMATION
ΓΡΑΦΕΙΟ ΤΥΠΟΥ ΒΡΥΞΕΛΛΩΝ

Βρυξέλλες 15-1-2003
Α.Π.ΒΡ.Φ.0230.1/30

Συντάκτης : Κ. Μαυροειδής

ΥΠΟΥΡΓΕΙΟ ΤΥΠΟΥ & Μ.Μ.Ε.
Δ/ΝΣΗ ΥΠΗΡΕΣΙΩΝ ΕΣΩΤΕΡΙΚΟΥ

ΠΡΟΣ:- Υπουργείο Τύπου
Διεύθυνση Υπηρεσιών Εξωτερικού
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Ενημέρωσης
-ΜΕΑ/ΕΕ
-ΥΠΕΞ
Γραφείο ΥΠΕΞ
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ΘΕΜΑ: Άρθρο στο περιοδικό "The Bulletin" για την ελληνική Προεδρία.

Σας αποστέλλουμε συνημμένα άρθρο του **Bob Taylor**, στο εβδομαδιαίο αγγλόφωνο περιοδικό των Βρυξελλών, **The Bulletin**, με τίτλο "2003: η ελληνική οδύσσεια".

Στο άρθρο περιγράφεται η θετική εξέλιξη της πορείας της Ελλάδας στο πλαίσιο της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης, που την καθιστά σύμφωνα με το δημοσιογράφο "κατάλληλο πρότυπο ρόλου" για τα δέκα νέα κράτη της Ε.Ε. στην προσπάθεια σύγκλισης τους με τις άλλες ευρωπαϊκές χώρες τα επόμενα χρόνια, κι αυτό παρά τα προβλήματα που εξακολουθεί να έχει η Ελλάδα. Στο άρθρο επισημαίνονται αναλυτικά οι προτεραιότητες και τα διακυβεύματα που τίθενται για την ελληνική προεδρία για το επόμενο εξάμηνο, με ειδικότερη καταληκτική αναφορά στον ενδεχόμενο πόλεμο στο Ιράκ.

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προϊστάμενος

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Συνημμένα: σελ. δύο (2).

News EU Presidency focus

2003: a Greek odyssey

Greece has come a long way since it joined the European Union 21 years ago. This makes it a fitting role model for the 10 new members as it runs the EU presidency for the next six months. **Bob Taylor reports**

When the government of Costas Simitis took over the presidency on January 1, Greece had just ended a year as the fastest-growing economy in the EU. The coming year promises a replay. In 2001 – to general surprise – Greece earned its way into the eurozone. It is as a self-confident core member that the Greek government will put on the style in Athens on April 16 when present and new EU members formally sign the enlargement deal negotiated at the Copenhagen summit last month.

How times have changed. Greece was a basket case when it entered the then European Community in 1981. It was propelled in, partly under American pressure (sounds familiar?), before many people, including the European Commission, thought it was ready. During the first three years of membership, an army of Commission officials shuttled between Brussels and Athens to coax, cajole and bully the Greek administration into implementing EC policies and giving up centuries-old Levantine practices and habits.

The shock therapy succeeded, although it took time: by the mid-1980s Jacques Delors was still musing out loud that Greek membership had been a mistake.

If the treatment worked for Greece, can it work for the newcomers? The answer is: probably, up to a point. The trouble is that Commission President Romano Prodi doesn't have enough armies at his disposal to handle the equivalent of 10 recalcitrant Greeces. It will be much better if the newcomers are able to emulate the self-help and self-discipline approach

adopted by Simitis and his Socialist government since 1996. It has been even more crucial to Greece's success.

This is not to say that Greece has become a star pupil. It has been less astute in using EU membership (and money) to accelerate economic development than the other poor countries, Portugal and Ireland, with which it is inevitably compared. The nation's wealth – measured in terms of GDP – is still less than 70 percent of the EU average. Greece is among those EU countries most frequently taken to task by the Commission for failing to implement, or for not implementing correctly, EU directives. It can show the same mean streak as other governments in defending national interests – as over Cyprus.

In other words, Greece is now as mainstream as you can get. If the newcomers can be in a similar position in the next 10 years or so, the problems of enlargement will be largely over. This is asking a lot. For one thing, with the exception of Cyprus and Slovenia, their national GDPs range between one third and 55 percent of the EU average. Secondly, and more difficult to handle, is the mindset they bring to the Union. Having freed themselves from Soviet colonialism only a dozen years ago, most are reluctant to transfer part of their new-won sovereignty to Brussels. This learning process

Greece says it wants to keep a seat warm at the table for Turkey



will be a painful one. But we are moving ahead of the current Greek presidency.

Its principal task is to take charge of the procedures for signing the enlargement treaty and to push towards the next phase in entry negotiations for the remaining candidate countries, Bulgaria and Romania, now due to join in 2007. Greece also says it wants to keep a seat warm at the negotiating table for neighbour and rival, Turkey.

Like other countries when they take over the EU presidency, Greece is being allowed one regional sideshow. This takes the form of a summit between the

Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis: the self-help approach has worked

in Serbia, Albania and Macedonia as well as in Bulgaria and Romania. Croatia will help set the tone for the summit if, as expected, it submits a formal request to join the EU to the Greek presidency in the coming weeks.

But handling the seemingly never-ending enlargement process will be the easy part of the presidency. Much more difficult, for instance, will be the task of interfacing with the European Convention, chaired by former French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, which is due to submit its final proposals for the future of Europe to EU leaders when they meet in Thessalonica. Already at their mid-term summit in Brussels in March, it looks as if Simitis will have to mediate in what have become the most divisive issues at the convention: power-sharing among institutions and the formal leadership of the Union.

If Simitis can play his part in closing down the Convention, then a formal inter-governmental conference (IGC) will start work at the end of this year, or early 2004, to translate its proposals into EU law. The new member states will take part in the IGC, even if they are not due to join the EU until May 2004.

The Greek presidency also expects that, by the end of its term in June, the EU will be able to declare operational its much-vaunted rapid reaction force. This force of up to 60,000 troops, which needs to be deployable within 60 days and able to operate in the field for up to a year, is the cornerstone of the new European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). The chances of creating the rapid reaction force on time have improved since the Copenhagen summit in December when the vexed question of how the EU force can use Nato assets was clarified. But US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld muddied the waters somewhat with his proposal for a similar 20,000-strong Nato reaction force which he submitted to Alliance governments in October 2002.

The new ESDP got off to a modest start on January 1 when the EU took over (from the United Nations) responsibility for the International Police Task Force, now re-named the European Union Police Mission, in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The role of the 500-member mission is to train and advise local police forces.

Encouraged by the Copenhagen deal on access to Nato equipment, the EU is now preparing to take over from Nato the running of Sfor, the international military stabilisation force in Bosnia. A first assessment of the timing of a handover will be submitted to the Greek presidency as early as February. The 900-strong Nato force in Macedonia, which is led by Germany, is already being readied for transfer from Nato to EU authority.

The Greek presidency is keen to speed up work on creating a coherent EU policy on immigration and refugees. Most Union governments – of the right and of the left – support the need for better protection of legal immigrants already established in the EU combined with swifter action to deal with new would-be illegal immigrants and bogus refugees. But this area is a legal minefield, and progress will be slow: major agreements may elude the Greek presidency.

Then there is Iraq. The fragility of the present EU position is evident in the statement issued at the Copenhagen summit last month. Here the 15 Union leaders huddle thankfully under the umbrella of Security Council Resolution 1441. But the terms of the resolution are not static; they set a timetable. New action will need to be taken sooner rather than later during the Greek presidency. European unity may be stretched beyond breaking point in the process.

There are three main options. The first is that Saddam Hussein has come clean, and we breathe a collective sigh of relief. The second is that he has lied and is exposed as a liar by means of irrefutable proof provided by the US or the weapons inspectors. In either case, the consequences are clear: peace or war. The EU can live with both outcomes, particularly as the war would then presumably have Security Council backing. But what of the third option? If Saddam more or less comes clean, yet the US more or less convinces some allies that he is hiding something, what then?

It will mean goodbye to EU unity as individual member states follow their own national instincts and interests. If George W Bush then goes to war against Saddam, how many EU countries will follow? If deep divisions emerge at this point, as well they might, the honest thing for Simitis and Giscard to do would be to hang a "gone-to lunch" sign outside the Convention door and leave it there for a long time.