

**Keynote Address by Prime Minister Antonis Samaras
On the Greek EU Presidency Achievements
at the 51st Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs**

Monday, June 16, 2014

Dear friends,

Greece assumed the Presidency of the EU Council under difficult circumstances. It was difficult for Greece itself, because Greece is only now recovering from its worst crisis in decades. But also for the entire EU, which faced its biggest challenge since it was established: A financial crisis that shook the certainties of European citizens and, for a moment, created doubts even regarding the Union itself.

Our first objective was to respond to the pressing needs of European citizens. And then we had to restore to the extent possible, amidst problems discussed at this conference, the credibility of the EU to European citizens and its ability to generate results in critical circumstances.

This is the only way a crisis can eventually strengthen you: When people, despite doubts, despite trials, learn to trust their leadership; and when they see that changes being introduced allow development again, shield social cohesion, and correct errors of the past, leading to a renaissance of Hope.

During the Greek Presidency, as many as 67 legislative documents were completed at a political level, while political consensus was achieved at a Council level for several more, which Italy will be called to negotiate with the European Parliament. Moreover, significant political documents on the security and prosperity of European citizens were negotiated, agreed upon, and adopted.

Thereby, the priorities of the Greek Presidency basically addressed all critical issues facing European citizens today:

Responding to the euro's "structural deficits," as they emerged during this last crisis, and now aiming at EU's deepening with a priority on EMU's deepening; with the promotion of a Banking Union playing a central role, symbolically as well as practically ...

Halting recession and tackling unemployment, which have crucially struck social cohesion in Europe; in this context we promoted policies and interventions that enhance development in the long term, create jobs immediately and in the medium-term and provide short-term relief to those unemployed, especially young people ...

Placing an emphasis on immigration, borders, border protection, and mobility, with a view eventually to a completion of an Area of Freedom, Security and Justice; we are doing both in this field: building a long-term vision of a single area for Europe, without overlooking the immediate problems generated by illegal migration, especially into those countries that, due to their location, suffer the greatest pressure

At the same time, my friends, the Presidency highlighted as a "horizontal issue" the Maritime Policies of the European Union: The aim was to make full use of the potential offered by the sea for development and job creation; after all, the sea - and particularly the Mediterranean – has been the historical cradle of European Civilization, while it can also offer solutions to many of our current problems.

To be more specific:

First, regarding a repair of “structural”, as I have said, “deficits” of EMU, the Greek Presidency politically completed the Regulation for a Single Resolution Mechanism (SRM). This development, in combination with the intergovernmental Agreement for a Single Resolution Fund (SRF), represents a major and decisive step towards the Banking Union. A few years ago none of this existed even on paper, while they are becoming a reality now ...

At the same time, our Presidency completed a significant number of “dossiers” regarding the financial services market, so as to strengthen the security and transparency of the system as well as the responsibility of all those involved.

Let me just mention:

The Markets in Financial Instruments Directive and Regulation;

The Directive for the comparability of the deposit accounts commissions;

The Regulation on key information documents for packaged retail investment products (PRIIPS) for individual investors;

and the new European norms for collective investments in transferable securities.

Secondly, the Greek Presidency promoted, with specific targets and tangible results, measures regarding the competitiveness of the European economy, always aiming to stimulate employment and foster social cohesion.

These measures include:

First, the unanimous adoption of the legislative package of own resources, which will ensure stable financing of European policies in the context of the “Financial Perspectives” (of the Multiannual Financial Framework)

Secondly, the agreement on the financing of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, which ensures the unobstructed financing of the new Common Fisheries Policy of the EU

Third, the adoption of legislative acts such as:

- the Regulation on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market (e-idas), the regulation that will ensure reliable and user-friendly electronic transactions between businesses, citizens, and public services (e-business and e-commerce),
- the Directive on the posting of workers, improving the functioning of the internal market, while ensuring respect for rights, fighting against "social dumping" and undeclared work,
- the Directive on electronic invoicing of public procurement, which will reduce the barriers to entry, especially for, which concerns us most of all, small and medium-sized businesses, and
- the Directive on the disclosure of non-financial information by certain European enterprises, which helps combat tax evasion.

In parallel, we have achieved an agreement on EU participation in the capital increase of the European Investment Fund, a matter of utmost importance, as it will strengthen the financial capacity of the Fund, eventually improving, I repeat, access particularly by SMEs to European financing.

Regarding investments, some important "dossiers" have also been completed, such as an "innovation package," which introduces a new generation of public-private partnerships for large scale projects that will revitalize employment in Europe.

In the telecommunications and infrastructure sector, two very important Directives were adopted:

- The first Directive seeks to reduce the cost of installation of high-speed electronic communications networks.
- The second regulates the development of alternative fuel infrastructure.

Both Directives highlight innovation and consolidate investment in infrastructure integration at a European level, while generating multiplier effects in terms of growth and job creation, especially for smaller businesses in Europe.

All these, my friends, represent minor or major components of a large-scale "puzzle" that highlights an image of entrepreneurship, competitiveness, research, and innovation in Europe. All previous presidencies contributed their own pieces. Presidencies to follow will also complete what remains to be done. But I must say that the Greek Presidency put many crucial pieces in place. And an image now

begins to form, an image of Hope and Anticipation of a competitive Europe in a worldwide context for decades to come...

Thirdly, the management of migratory flows and particularly of a growing wave of illegal immigration has been one of the biggest challenges the Greek Presidency had to deal with. Now we all know and understand that immigration, especially illegal immigration, is not just a problem for countries in the South. It involves all member-states. It has a pan-European character. The impact on economic growth and social cohesion is experienced by everyone. It concerns us all. And we can deal with this effectively only if we are together, if we are united ...

Significant achievements regarding this field include the following:

First, the revision of a list of non-EU countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders of the EU;

Secondly, instructions regarding conditions of entry and residency by non-EU nationals in the context of inter-enterprise mobility and aiming at seasonal employment

The Greek Presidency also achieved adoption of a Regulation on the surveillance of the EU external sea borders, i.e., in the context of operational cooperation coordinated by FRONTEX. This is a very important step following years of negotiations.

Nevertheless, I would say that the leading achievement of the Greek Presidency was the definition of Strategic Guidelines regarding new legislative and operational planning in the field of Justice and Home Affairs (what we call Post-Stockholm).

The new document again places the principle of solidarity as its focus. And it specifies this principle practically in relation to asylum and the management of borders and migration flows. It also incorporates migration in the context of EU foreign policy, linking it to development cooperation and to cooperation with non-EU countries.

It introduces the principle of positive "conditionality" in EU cooperation with third countries, while it includes the development of effective repatriation policies, in conjunction with the policy on visas and readmission.

In other words, we should not react passively to problems. We go ahead and solve them!

From now on, we should not just confront negative effects. We should confront problems that have already accumulated from previous years.

The regular repatriation of a large number of illegal immigrants who have already crossed European borders without having a right to asylum, along with the breaking up of the criminal networks that propel and take advantage of them, are the great priorities from now on. And we can and must find solutions to these problems.

Departing from my notes, allow me to tell you that in my district, where I get elected since 1977, when I first entered Parliament, I recently noted – in connection with one of those horrible images that we all experience when we see in front of us the drama of a boat full of people coming in illegally – that every one of those nearly two hundred people coming from Afghanistan inside that boat had paid 2,500 dollars to some trafficker in their home country. As always, a pregnant woman or a few children are placed in front so as to show that there is need of immediate relief, as if it would not be forthcoming. But there is also a trafficker in some illegal network who, after having abandoned these people to their fate, after having left them out to sea, if not in the water, is now rich and does not care about the lives of these people. Of course, we must save these souls first, but we must also coordinate with each other on a European level in order to be able to arrest illegal traffickers of human pain. Very little has been done on this matter. There must be specific coordination among all our countries, so as to be in a position to locate and arrest traffickers, so that they realize that they cannot keep on playing this game of horror and misery. I consider this extremely important and I think it should trouble every one of us.

Fourthly, dear friends, a basic idea of the maritime theme of the Greek Presidency has been to redefine Europe's relation with the sea and include in maritime policies in an integrated way all dimensions of economic growth, energy, and security.

A key development in this respect is the European Maritime Security Strategy, which is to be adopted in June of 2014. It is the first time that the EU is formulating an integrated, inter-sectoral strategy with the ultimate goal of a more effective security, including energy security, and, I must repeat, a more effective bolstering of the economic interests of the member states regarding the sea.

This strategy will explicitly define the strategic interests and threats in the global maritime space and will make the most out of already existing structures and means of the EU, resulting in better use of resources and less bureaucracy.

Lastly, a great challenge for Europe's integrated strategy involving the sea is for member states to be encouraged to develop their economic resources, especially energy resources, which belong to their maritime spaces.

Beyond this, agreement was achieved in relation to the Directive on Maritime Spatial Planning. It is a development that will lead to essential and positive benefits for tourism and the environment. Furthermore, a Regulation for the financing of the European Maritime Safety Agency for the period 2014-2020 was adopted, so that funds required for the implementation of agency tasks involving protection of the sea environment have been secured.

At the institutional level, another considerable achievement of the Greek Presidency has been the adoption of the Regulation on the status and financing of European political parties and European political foundations. This new Regulation will lead to considerable quality improvement of representative democracy on a European level through the emergence of truly European political parties, so that a gulf that exists today between national societies and the European political stage can be bridged.

And finally, my friends, let me stress solidarity as a fundamental principle of the European Union. The Greek Presidency highlighted the significance of this principle through specific actions:

Through new rules for the EU Solidarity Fund that will allow a more rapid reaction in case of natural disasters, through the Resolution on the implementation of the Solidarity Clause by the Union that will allow member states to act together and provide support to any member state that may need to invoke the Solidarity Clause in case of a terrorist attack as well as in case of disasters, either natural or man-made.

Solidarity is a great word. But it is not just a word.

It is a value that is being tested in exceptional circumstances. Now we are ready to prove that a united Europe is, among other things, a space where this solidarity can become reality.

This is a short report on the Greek Presidency. At many points we followed up on very good work carried out by previous presidencies. At some other points we initiated policies we expect to be continued and completed by presidencies to follow. Europe, as a whole, withstood the challenges and is coming out stronger. This certainly also proves the strength of the European project.

What I should add is that Greece, too, is coming out of its crisis stronger. This also proves the strength and maturity of the Greek people.

Out of all that was done during the last six months, some may consider the steps taken regarding a Banking Union as the most significant. In Greece as well as in some other countries of the south, measures taken to deal with illegal immigration and relief from unemployment may be considered as more important. Believe me; in a country like ours, where unemployment climbed to 28% last September, with 60% among young people, you can imagine the enormity of difficulties. And regarding the measures taken – for example, during these last few years we lost 25% of our national income – you must realize that these measures would not have yielded results without the enormous sacrifices made by Greek people and by each Greek household. The fact that unemployment has begun to drop slowly, but surely during recent months; the fact that that a significant investment framework for

Greece is being put into place; the fact that everyone is recognizing that from a public finance and structural perspective we have taken great strides during these difficult times; all these facts give us optimism about tomorrow. Greece is indeed coming out of this crisis stronger.

From a longer term perspective, the most important contribution of the Greek Presidency may be the one involving a “turn to the sea” and an upgrading of the Maritime Policies of Europe.

Either way, Europe is a space of Freedom, Democracy, and Solidarity.

We are certainly open to criticism, because this is the essence of Freedom

We are ready for changes and even policy revisions, because this is also the essence of Democracy.

We are willing to give help in the framework of solidarity as Europeans because this is the essence of our Union; and because by showing solidarity to someone, everyone wins at the end.

But above all, I wish to tell you that we are proud of Europe. We are proud of the work done, of the work being done, and of the new prospects being created. These are prospects for competitiveness and prosperity for everyone.

Our European Union – and I deeply believe this – is our strength. And our ability to overcome problems is proof that we use this strength wisely.

And that we deserve the position we hold today in the world and the role we continue to claim.

Thank you very much and I am happy to see you in Greece. Keep well.