

SPEECH BY
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It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to Greece, as members of our great political family in Europe, the European People's Party.

The Constantinos Karamanlis Institute for Democracy has taken a particularly important initiative in using the opportunity provided by the European Ideas Network Review Meeting to invite all of our partners whose work and thinking enriches the political positions and actions of the parties which comprise the European People's Party.

Firstly, because it underscores the excellent level of cooperation which exists among us. Today, the EPP is the biggest and indeed the most active political group in the European Union. And this can surely be ascribed to the fact that we have successfully managed to coordinate our actions.



Secondly, because it proves that clear, unambiguous political positioning is the fundamental prerequisite for all optimistic future planning. Without ideas, without a vision, there can be no politics. And on that front we, the political forces who comprise the EPP, have every reason to be proud.

The overwhelming majority of European citizens have today espoused the principles and values which over the years have underpinned our political platform. Political forces from which we were separated by a huge divide in terms of our basic convictions have now moved much closer to our views.

This development, this reality, increases the responsibility incumbent upon us. The citizens of Europe are turning anew to the EPP for a fresh, ambitious and realistic vision for our continent. It is the EPP they are entrusting with planning the actions which will provide new, tangible prospects for the goal of a United Europe.

Europe is expecting us to provide answers to the challenges of the new era:

- Ensuring the cohesion, functionality and efficiency of the new, enlarged European Union;

- Promoting the goal of deepening our integration;
- Strengthening competitiveness, entrepreneurship and employment;
- Seeking a more active role in defending peace, democracy, security, development and prosperity in our broader neighbourhood and throughout the world.

We must respond successfully to these challenges. We owe it to our peoples and to the political tradition we represent. We owe it to the history of our continent. We owe it to the commitment we have jointly entered into, towards a Europe which will ensure conditions of peace, security, democracy and development for all its peoples, for all its citizens.

A few days ago here in Greece we celebrated the 25th anniversary of our country's accession to the then EEC. We saw this anniversary as an opportunity to consider what has been achieved in Europe thus far and what future prospects lie ahead.

We all recognise the many major steps that Europe has already taken. The European cooperation structures, from the European Coal and Steel Community to the European Union, have:

- Consolidated democracy and peace where, not long before, two World Wars had broken out;
- Instituted common policies on a series of crucial issues;
- Achieved monetary union;
- Greatly strengthened in economic, social and institutional terms all of the Member States without exception, Greece included;
- Extended the great European family, whose Member States now number 25, promoting in practice the vision of an ultimately united continent.

However, it is just as commonly recognised that much still remains to be done. Whereas major headway may well have been made towards monetary union, the same cannot be said for political union. Whereas the common currency has become a tangible reality for hundreds of millions of Europeans, similarly important steps have still not been taken towards a genuinely common Foreign and Defence Policy. In the final analysis, Europe has not managed to speak to the conscience of her citizens.

Even more so, it is becoming increasingly obvious that Europe, having achieved some important objectives to date, it now needs to set similar goals for the future, that demonstrate ambition and at the same time realism. We need to think of the Europe we wish to deliver to the next generation and the specific actions we need to undertake in order to achieve this.

It is becoming increasingly obvious that we must dare to move forward, to take the steps which will lead to a stronger, more functional Europe--a Europe which is closer to its citizens.

It is of course legitimate that divergent views should be heard within the Union, and particularly since nowadays 25 Member States--soon to be 27, with the accession of

Bulgaria and Romania--are bringing together their views and ideas. In fact, it is first and foremost our capacity to build consensus step by step; to successfully bridge the gap between dissenting and convergent views; to demonstrate unity through divergence; that characterizes the strength of our Union.

Yet, if we are always to be in a position to successfully attain the desirable synthesis in order to produce tangible results which will improve the everyday lives of Europeans, we need to agree on the basic, fundamental principles which dictate our collective action.

Europe is where it finds itself today because it was built on non-negotiable principles and values. That is an "acquis" which we must consistently defend, both vis-à-vis the current Member States, but also in making it clear to any country aspiring to join our family that there can be no concessions.

Thus, based on these principles, we must propose a new path of collective action. And even more so, we must build our political discourse on unshakeable arguments. The role to be played by the political powers, the role of the think-tanks which produce political thinking, is pivotal therein.

To this end, the Lisbon strategy is the road map which guides our course:

- It is the strategy for the planned changes which aspire to achieve both economic and social results.
- It is the pursuit of more rapid growth, drawing on new technologies, research and innovation.
- It is the pursuit of high added value in our economies, whilst respecting the environment and ensuring sustainable development.
- It is the path towards a more competitive, more cohesive, more social Europe, a Europe which shows its social face.

The key towards achieving these aims lies in one single concept: Reform. Now, more than ever, within an extremely competitive international environment, we must all accept our responsibilities towards the citizens, towards Europe, and towards up-and-coming generations. With as broad a consensus as possible, with efficacy and social sensitivity, we must bring about the necessary reforms and incisive changes in our institutions, our economy, and our society.

As for our political family, the EPP, we must spearhead these efforts. Our fundamental political premise, which marries a free economy with social sensitivity and cohesion, is the only one capable of guaranteeing the transition to a new era of high expectations for the European Union and its Member States.

We, the political forces which comprise the EPP, stand for a broad social alliance, which transcends the dividing lines of the past. We stand for the alliance of the modern-day social centre, the interface where policies meet man. We stand for the alliance of citizens who,

irrespective of ideological allegiance, recognise the need for reform and are seeking new political structures and practices, which can ensure fresh effectiveness and new prospects of growth and prosperity.

Our main comparative advantage is that there was no need for us to negotiate our principles and ideals. We have shown that our path leads to social results for all citizens, the least privileged in particular. Our main comparative advantage is that our aims and the policies we propose in order to achieve them, are both crystal-clear and tested.

Allow me at this point to refer to the example of my country. For the past two and a half years, since the elections in March 2004, we have been implementing the incisive changes and reforms which our country so needs, as indeed we promised to our citizens. We are taking steps which should have been taken years ago. We are correcting errors, covering gaps and omissions which were preventing our country and our people from exploiting their full potential. We are creating the conditions for a better future for all Greeks.

We opted for the path of reform in the firm belief that the Greek people judge, compare and assess the position, consistency and work of all the political forces. We started to gradually adapt our finances to the framework of our obligations towards the EU, in the conviction that our citizens realise that a strong economy is the very cornerstone for any growth plan.

Today, two and a half years on, the fruits of the Reform are already visible. Today, Greece is very close to reaching her budgetary objectives, consistently has one of the highest growth rates in the European Union, and at the same time is seriously reducing unemployment. Today, Greeks can once again look to the future with optimism.

I referred to the example of Greece because I believe it shows in practice that citizens are prepared to support reform if they can be persuaded that it is necessary and will prove effective. They are prepared to actively support the political powers and the major strategy options which guarantee the quality change our societies need. Today's citizens are more mature than many would care to believe.

As such, the work of the political think-tanks which supply the EPP members is facilitated. Since the vast majority of citizens sympathise with our need to provide a tough answer to those who preach inertia and stagnation, what we need to do is to set out in the clearest possible terms the political proposal which will move us towards the objectives we all support. And that applies both to the future of Europe and to national policies.

It is then fortunate, that within our political family the in-depth debate and exchange of views and ideas constitute an on-going process, a constant practice. The EPP's European Ideas Network creates in practice the foundations upon which we are already building the new people's and citizens' Europe, the Europe of peace and prosperity.

I am convinced that your presence here will help to further consolidate our common proposal and to forge a common European identity. I welcome you and I wish you fruitful and creative proceedings.