



E.O.A.E.N.

Scientific Conference, Opening Session

**The contribution of the Greek Insular Economy
over the last 200 years. 1821-2021**

Piraeus

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Conference Opening Session, Address

My dream for our islands

Good evening ladies and gentlemen! Honourable Minister, Rector of the University of Piraeus, President of the EOAEN, Presidents, dear friends.

It is my pleasure to be with you this evening in this remarkable gathering in Piraeus that on the occasion of the two hundred years of Greek independence is celebrating the participation and contribution of the Greek islands to the Greek national economy.

A word of thanks is in place to the President and the Board of Directors of the Chambers Group for the Development of Greek Islands. A word of thanks for inviting me to be with you, but above all, a word of thanks to the Chambers Group of the Greek Islands for their constant and continuous support to our Association, INSULEUR, the Network of the Insular Chambers of Commerce and Industry of the European Union.

A word of greetings from the island where I come from, is also due. I bring greetings from the island of Ogygia of the ancient past, the Gozo, Malta, of today, sharing with you the experience of the Mediterranean, which is our lifeline. These are our identical roots which today make us part of the same European family.

I would like to start my short address by asking a very simple question: What would Greece be without its islands? And this simple question warrants a simple answer. It would not be Greece. With 2000 islands and islets which make about one fifth of the land area of the whole country and a population of about thirteen per cent of the country, the contribution to the economy is immeasurable.

Throughout this momentous period of the Covid-19 pandemic which has wrought havoc in the businesses of our islands, I have been stating that as islanders we must

see this pandemic as an opportunity rather than the disaster it is. Let us all firmly believe that positivity could and should be the rule of the day.

On the economic front, the pandemic has shown how fragile our economy is. As in all islands, and the Greek islands are no exception, our economy's main pillar is tourism. The lesson to be learnt is this. We need to strengthen tourism and make it more sustainable but we must also create new sectors. To be resilient, our economy needs to be diversified.

As I see things our islands must march forward on a binary trail, that of an economic model which focuses on the digital transformation of our islands, and by making our islands more sustainable through a circular economic model. This binary approach is itself confirmed in the Temporary Framework of last 8 May which states that, "The green transition and the digital transformation will play a central and priority role in ensuring a successful recovery".¹ This was again confirmed by Valdis Dombrovskis European Union Vice-President and Commissioner of Trade who during the approval of the Greek Recovery and Resilience Plan again stated that "Greece's recovery plan will help it emerge stronger from the pandemic and equip the economy for a greener and more digital future".²

As president of INSULEUR I always sustain that we as islands can only perform well if we unite our resources, our strengths, our ideas. Islands need to collaborate together because of the many issues that are common to all of them. However, this collaboration has become more urgent in the aftermath of this pandemic. It is to be a collaboration based on solidarity that will take us forward for years to come. Your Chambers Group is a perfect example of this collaboration!

I wish you all the best for this conference and may the principles of unity and solidarity always guide us forward. Thank you!

¹ European Commission, *Communication from the Commission. Amendment to the Temporary Framework for State Aid measures to support the economy in the current COVID-19 outbreak*, Brussels 8 May 2020, in https://ec.europa.eu/competition/state_aid/what_is_new/sa_covid19_2nd_amendment_temporary_framework_en.pdf page 2, paragraph 9

² European Commission, *Next Generation EU: European Commission endorses Greece's €30.5 billion recovery and resilience plan*, Brussels 17 June 2021, in https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_3022