

**CORFU INFORMAL OSCE MINISTERIAL MEETING
WELCOMING REMARKS BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF GREECE
MR. KOSTAS KARAMANLIS**

Corfu, Sunday 28 June 2009

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Homer's Odyssey, Corfu represents the last stop before Ulysses reaches Ithaca, his final destination. It represents the phase when Ulysses, after a long and adventurous journey, finds a comfortable place to rest; yet, it represents a treacherous phase because he is constantly faced with the temptation to forget that he is not yet at home, that he has not yet reached his destination, that he has still a few miles to go. It is in Corfu, that Ulysses eventually taps in his last strength and finds the resolve to make the final stretch and reach his destination.

This year will mark the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. This is indeed a time to celebrate the remarkable progress we have achieved together over the past two decades. The European continent enjoys an unprecedented degree of security and stability.

Yet, the challenges we are still facing remind us that much work remains undone, and that the vision of a united continent, built on universal principles and indivisible security, as expressed in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and the 1990 Charter of Paris, is not yet a reality for all of Europe. We have gone a long way, but we haven't yet reached our destination. We are in Ulysses' Corfu, but we still need to make a few more miles to reach Ithaca.

Foreign Ministers and representatives of the 56 OSCE participating States, coming from the vast area that stretches from Vancouver to Vladivostok, along with the Secretaries General of major regional Organizations operating in the OSCE area, have gathered in Corfu in order to renew their resolution and commitment and make a fresh start to continue the journey that started 35 years ago in Helsinki, aiming at reaching the final destination: a Europe united, free and in peace.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I warmly welcome you in this island of great symbolism, of renewed hope and fresh beginnings. The entire world is going through a complicated and turbulent era with serious and critical challenges. We are facing considerable problems resulting from the most severe financial crisis of the post-War era, a crisis that accentuates the uncertainty and insecurity and calls for the enlargement and deepening of international cooperation.

We are equally facing the double environmental and climate challenge that heightens the anxiety over the future of mankind.

Furthermore, 2008 was a challenging year for European security. Events throughout the year made clear that the quest for security has become even more complex and difficult; the only constant in the international environment can be found in constant change.

Thus, Greece assumed the OSCE Chairmanship at a very crucial time for the OSCE community of nations. Furthermore, the OSCE itself, while destined to shape European security had been transformed into a mirror merely reflecting the complex problems, divisions and different strategic perceptions among the 56 participating States. This situation, though not unexpected, needs to be drastically rectified.

The crises of 2008 shattered long-standing perceptions regarding security in the OSCE region. However, history teaches us that crises are often the springboards for improvement. The Chinese word for crisis is made of two characters: one means danger, the other means opportunity. We have to grasp the opportunity; we have to overcome the danger. And I am convinced that we have all the tools necessary in order to turn the crisis into opportunity.

Greece is convinced that an open, bona fide, inclusive and open-ended dialogue is the first step in order to restore confidence and trust among the “56” participating States and enhance our collective capacity to solve old problems and address new challenges. Dialogue remains the most adequate and efficient means in resolving the differences and re-establishing a climate of confidence. The framework is obvious: It is the respect of International Law, International Conventions and Human Rights.

OSCE, as a pan-European forum for dialogue, (endowed with a unique system of Confidence and Security Building Measures) serves the common objectives of all nations.

This irreplaceable forum has served us well, though not up to its real potential. It is high time to explore ways on how it can serve us even better, adapted in the multifaceted challenges of the 21st century. It is our duty to the founders of the Helsinki spirit, to our peoples and to our children and the future generations. I hope that your meeting in Corfu will blow fresh wind in our sails and will keep our commitment to our common security alive so that we will reach safely together our Ithaca.