

## **Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Evangelos Venizelos' welcome speech at the opening ceremony of the Hellenic Presidency of the Council of the European Union**

Mr. President of the Republic,  
Your All Holiness,  
Mr. President of the European Council,  
Mr. President of the European Commission,  
Your Beatitude,  
Ladies and Gentlemen Ambassadors,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Greece is assuming the six-month rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the fifth time. The holding of the Presidency is an institutional obligation for every member state. And in light of the Greek people's harsh experience of the crisis and the frequently unfair international debate on Greece and the Greeks, this Presidency is an opportunity for Greece to put forward its true face: that of an institutionally equal member state of the European Union.

As the Presidency, Greece will move in a wholly European spirit, within the institutional framework of the Union, pursuing the greatest possible consensus with the goal of promoting the Council's agenda, in close cooperation with the European Parliament and the European Commission.

The Hellenic Presidency – thanks to the relevant experience we have as a country – is organized in a frugal and practical manner, targeting matters of substance.

Greece has a full sense of the role and limits of the rotating Presidency of the Council, and will work closely with the permanent presidencies of the European Council, the Foreign Affairs Council, and of the Eurogroup. But the Hellenic Presidency is obliged to point up the fact that it is a Presidency of the European South, a Mediterranean Presidency, a Presidency that will be exercised by a medium-population member state of the Union.

The Hellenic Presidency is European: dedicated to the major European priorities. But on a national level, these six months also coincide with our top priority, which is our turnaround to a definitive exit from the crisis and the Memorandum and a return to the "normalcy" of a member state of the Union and the Eurozone: fiscally stable, financially secure, developmentally competitive, socially cohesive, democratically strong, nationally proud.

This semester will be somewhat contracted in terms of parliamentary time, as the term of the current European Parliament – with which we will be working intensively over the first four months – ends ahead of the European elections. But this semester is very dense politically, because it is the six months leading up to the European elections and the six months of the great pan-European debate on the future of Europe. To the extent that Council initiatives fuel this debate, the Hellenic Presidency is prepared to contribute with ideas, as well as through the harsh experiences of the crisis, the recycling or

repetition of which should never be allowed by the Europe of the values in which we believe.

In this framework, the Hellenic Presidency's main political priorities are priorities of the citizens and peoples of the Union:

- Growth, jobs and the safeguarding of the social dimension of Europe, with the combatting of youth unemployment as the number-one issue.
- Integration of EU and Eurozone economic governance institutions, mainly through a Banking Union that does away with internal inequalities and guarantees deposits and equal potential for access by businesses to sources of financing.
- Protection of European borders and management of immigration flows, which is a top humanitarian priority, on the one hand, as well as a critical security issue for all of Europe, and not just for the countries on the Union's external borders; coastal countries, and especially Mediterranean countries.

It is reasonable that our Presidency should have a fourth, horizontal priority: that of integrated maritime policy, which concerns blue growth, fisheries, energy, the environment, tourism, and capitalization on maritime zones in accordance with the International Law of the Sea.

The Hellenic Presidency's logo refers to the sea and shipping, as well as to the ongoing historical challenge of European integration, which is our common quest, and which we want to be our common attainment.