



HELLENIC REPUBLIC
MINISTRY OF INTERIOR, DECENTRALIZATION
AND E-GOVERNANCE



**PRESS OFFICE OF
THE PRIME MINISTER**

Athens, 4th November 2009

SPEECH OF
THE PRIME MINISTER,
GEORGE PAPANDREOU
TO THE 3rd GLOBAL FORUM ON MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Mr. President of the Republic, Carolos Papoulias, Mr. Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, welcome to Greece Mr. Secretary General.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to welcome you all to Greece, especially Mr. Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon and Ms. Ban, with the opportunity provided by the 3rd Global Forum on Migration and Development.

The theme of this Forum is familiar to all Greek people, because Greek people know of migration, either individually or via their families. I was a migrant myself, I worked abroad as a migrant, as many of my fellow citizens.

I would to like to thank Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for the importance you attach to the theme and for your presence.

Migration is a phenomenon of today's globalization. But is this really the case? The truth is that migration is not just a present-day phenomenon. It might present certain distinctiveness, as always did, but people migrating from their place of origin has not been a regional phenomenon, but a crucial one for the development of our world, for our civilization, for the way we perceive our societies but also ourselves. It defined us and continues to do so.

History is written and civilizations are formed not only by the decisions of leaders and governments, but also by the many personal stories of

people, their needs, their ambitions that mobilize them and mobilize whole populations and nations.

These needs, these ambitions, during the course of human history, gave birth to migration. It would therefore be hidebound and fruitless for the future of us all to look at migration and its impact under a short-sighted and coincidental perspective. And this is the greatest contribution of this Global Forum on Migration and Development: the awareness of this global phenomenon, in order to open new ways.

New ways of thinking but also new ways of policy on regulating this phenomenon. This kind of regulation will allow us to avert extreme problems that we frequently encounter, such as racism, human trafficking, barbarous exploitation of women and children in particular and of course, the odyssey that so many migrants face on their way out of their country of origin.

Problems from the country of origin, problems in the country of destination, problems that affect us all. But development and migration are communicating vessels and provide us with the ability to realize also the beneficial possibilities of a regulated migration.

Because development, as the Forum promises and discusses, reduces migration to the countries of origin, but in turns and as it has been shown, migration also increases growth, an element that is many times omitted from public dialogue.

Indeed, migration has, in the countries of destination, contributed, for example, to filling empty work positions, to the creation of additional jobs for the native population, to improvement of the demographic indexes, to boosting the social security systems, to reduction of the production costs, to containment of inflationary pressures and to the improvement of the competition between the economies.

The fact that this discussion is taking place here in Greece is a 'happy coincidence' with great symbolism. Because Greece, my country, knows very well what migration means and knows even better that migration can work for everyone's benefit. Our own history has proven this.

Ancient Greek civilization would not have been a point of reference for the Mediterranean Basin, and obviously for the rest of the world, had the Greeks

not migrated to and settled in what are today's southern Italy, France, Egypt and the Middle East.

Modern Greece too is a child of migration. During the days of the struggle, before Greece's independence of 1821, Greeks from London, Odessa, Vienna, Constantinople and from other places well, mobilized to free the nation. Their books, their newspapers initiated our dreams of independence.

Many of the greatest Institutions in Greece, orphanages, schools, museums, hospitals, universities were built with the resources and the know-how provided by our Diaspora.

After the Second World War, the civil war and the dictatorship forced many Greeks to exile, where they regain their strength and then returned to Greece, ready to lead the country towards a better future, transferring experience, knowledge as well as hope to their country, Greece. All my family members were among them.

Every day, Greek migrants and their children return to their country, to help the development of this country, by teaching in our Universities, by creating successful businesses, by serving the State and the civil society and making us proud on a daily basis.

However, in the last 20 years Greece has undergone a fundamental transformation. The consolidation of democracy and the economic growth have transformed Greece from a country of origin to a country of destination of migrants, for people who came to our country in search of a better destiny.

It is all those who supported and support with their presence, the crucial sectors of our economy, in agriculture, in constructions, in tourism, in shipping. The migrants, too, have left their own, indelible mark on our country during the Athens 2004 Olympic Games preparations, through their work in the construction of the infrastructures.

For those people, the policy of our government will be the drastic promotion of measures for their integration and social inclusion, for the achievement of a socially coherent and righteous Greece. Our aim is to combat inequality and fear, making our society, our neighborhoods more humane and viable.

Within this framework and during the discussion that will take place at the Roundtable sessions, we will have an excellent opportunity to exchange information and experiences, to evaluate our practices, to conclude to the adoption of the best and most effective policies.

Already, as Government, we have committed to a series of distinct but also mutually supplementary axes of action: with the consolidation and ensurance of the legality of residency and the gradual passage into a regime of long-term residency for the regular migrants, with the intensive promotion of social integration so as to lift exclusion to access to fundamental social goods and services that are necessary for the development of each individual's personality and with their participation in the social life of the country, in education, work, application of measures to fight ghetto situations.

By boosting the participation of migrants in the country's civil life, through the ability to acquire Greek nationality mainly for the so-called "second generation", where we suggest acquiring the nationality when a young person is born within our country. With the institutionalization and establishment of a dialogue with the migrant organizations and related NGOs, which are concerned comprehensively with migration issues, but also with the participation of the long-residing migrants in local government elections, which is also an EU Policy.

Finally, our aim is to confront illegal migration on the criterion of consolidating our integration policies as well as respect of the fundamental human rights, through more efficient guarding of the borders, fuller utilization of the institutional abilities for the return to the country of origin, and through revision of the policy on granting political asylum, which currently does not meet our obligations.

And of course, by the new active negotiation on the distribution of the burden of illegal migrants and asylum-seekers within the EU, since, in reality, all of Europe is in the same transitional period as Greece, whereas our country, due to its geographical position, is one of the main destinations of migrants headed to the entire EU.

Today, we have the obligation to re-determine our relationships with the countries of origin, creating fair and mutually beneficial relations. We have to

find also ways in order to take in our hands, the hand of the State, the control of the movement of people, to regulate in other words, this movement among our countries.

The truth is that today migration is controlled, to a high degree, by unhesitating human traffickers. We have neglected human rights and the pride of millions of migrants during their odyssey. Our wager is to create legitimate and safe routes for migration. Especially now, during the economic crisis, the intensity of migration is growing, while at the same time the first victims of the consequences of this crisis are the migrants themselves, as it is shown by the latest Development Report Programme of the UN.

But we have to look at the issue of migration, in view of the Copenhagen Summit, given that the danger of climate change does not only concern the environment, but poses immense challenges with respect to the forced movement of hundred millions fellow citizens, due to the consequences of this climate change.

Our aim is then, for exactly these reasons, to make migration a choice, not a necessity, and to be able to regulate these immense issues.

For this reason, I will conclude with an aspect, which I consider to be more crucial compared to the narrow, economic side of migration. Humanity is called to manage, and indeed manage in a democratic and humane way, on the basis of common values, the whole planet, which today faces enormous issues and challenges.

We are called to manage and provide solutions to enormous problems, such as climate change, pandemics, poverty and inequality, energy crisis, food crisis, economic crisis.

My own, personal experience as a migrant and refugee, was for me a huge process of learning, acquiring knowledge for other people and traditions, for the function of democracy, for the respect of human rights, for the concept of human solidarity.

So if we are to confront, as a humanity, all these enormous problems our planet faces today, let us utilize the migration phenomenon as a big school for all the populations of the earth, the people of the earth, the citizens of the world.

A school that teaches us how to understand each other, how to communicate and cooperate with other people and citizens, a school that teaches democracy, respect to every human being. A school that teaches us how to solve common problems, overcoming the narrow limits of our societies, that teaches collective efforts, a school that teaches and consolidates common values. A school that will make us citizens of the world. Citizens of the world with common values, on which we will build our planet's future.

Within our discussion framework, development is not merely an economic issue. It is a matter of values. It is a matter of knowledge. It is, at the end, a matter of democracy. A matter of democracy for the countries of origin, for the migrants themselves but also for the countries of destination.

Dear Secretary General, Ladies and Gentlemen, for once more, I welcome you to Greece.

All the best for success.