

Greek national day

Greece-Japan friendship, cooperation span 110 years

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There's a country with a coastline of many thousands of kilometers, where the sea has played and is playing a pivotal role in its life. Its people pride themselves on their ancient history but nevertheless always have a keen eye for innovation and appetite for the modern. Love of honor is one of the main traits of its people's character but at the same time there is love for poetry and great affection for the blooming of trees. Yakumo Koizumi, or Lafcadio Hearn, is among its honored modern-day poets while an ancient theater tradition lives on and is revered to this day.



Greece? Japan? It can be either.

Greece and Japan are geographically as far apart as it almost gets. They have developed amid very different historical circumstances and their societies are at first glance organized in an utterly dissimilar manner. Yet there are so many things that connect those seemingly totally different people and so many similarities, which are there for the interested observer to discover. The above list that would have confused anybody as to which country is being described is far from exhaustive.

This message is written on the occasion of Greece's Independence Day in a year that has an increased symbolic value for the relations between Greece and Japan. We celebrate namely the 110th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations

between our two countries: 110 years, which — with the exception of the brief span of World War II — have been truly a period of amity and cloudless cooperation.

Greece and Japan are like-minded countries in a host of issues and work closely together in the framework of international organizations. Bilateral trade is steadily growing, although with still much room for further development and the adjacent article about bilateral economic relations gives some hints as to the areas that might be propitious for that. Last but not least, interest for each other's culture is as lively as ever.

It is precisely through culture that we wish to pay tribute to the long history of friendship between our peoples, and specifically through the two very special and important exhibitions organized under the auspices of the Embassy of Greece in Japan.

The first is about public art in the Athens Metro, an exhibition that will take place at the Tokyo National Museum from April 7 through May 10. It reveals, with audiovisual material, the unique and marvelous combination of ancient and contemporary works of art exhibited at stations on the Athens Metro. It also shows how the construction of the metro

served as the vehicle for one of the most extensive archaeological excavations ever undertaken, and how many of the finds were integrated into everyday life through their display at metro stations. The outcome is so interesting that it will be also the subject of a symposium at Keio University in Tokyo on April 6.

The second exhibition will take place at the Edo-Tokyo Museum from July 4 through September and shows the deep interest that Greeks have taken in Japanese art. It is called "Sharaku and other Japanese masterworks from the land of Nausicaa," that is from the island of Corfu, and will present

rare and exquisite Japanese paintings and prints from the Corfu Museum of Oriental Art. These masterpieces have never been shown before to the Japanese public and include some works by the famous Sharaku that cannot be found anywhere else.

Interest in each other's culture is the purest and most unselfish form of friendship. So I would like to conclude this message by dedicating the cultural activities I briefly described to the friendship between our two countries and to the future generations of our peoples that they may further enhance this friendship in the years to come.



Ancient and modern: Works of art from stations on the Athens Metro will be the theme of an exhibition at the Tokyo National Museum from April 7 through May 10.



Growing economy opens more doors to investors

In the last three years, the Greek economy has been expanding at an average annual rate of 4 percent, which is one of the highest rates in the euro zone. Greece has the 27th-highest per capita income in the world and unemployment fell from 11.3 percent in the first quarter of 2004 to 7.2 percent in the second quarter of 2008.

Bilateral economic relations between Greece and Japan are excellent, and in terms of trade, they become stronger each year. Greek companies cooperate admirably with their Japanese counterparts and are ready to take up any business challenge in the demanding Japanese market.

Food sector

Especially in the food sector, Greece has been blessed since ancient times with a wide range of natural and nutritious food products, thus making the Greek diet the best

balanced diet in the world and the cornerstone of the Mediterranean diet. The Greek diet is based on foods that are high in nutrients and low in animal fats, such as olive oil, olives, wheat, dairy products (feta cheese and yogurt), honey, red saffron, mastic gum, fish, fruits, vegetables, legumes and wine.

Highly nutritious Greek food products are produced by applying traditional methods in modern and technologically advanced facilities that maintain the highest possible standards for human safety. It is worth mentioning that 84 Greek food products (12 percent of European Union products) have acquired the PDO status of the special safeguard system that the EU has established for the better protection of consumers.

Of these 84 products, 30 percent is olive oils, 26 percent fruits, legumes, vegetables and cereals, 24 percent

cheese, 12 percent table olives, and 8 percent various products such as honey, baked goods, fish food, mastic gum and saffron.

Under these conditions, it is no surprise that during 2007 Greek olive oil has increased its share in the Japanese market by a whopping 33.5 percent.

Nevertheless, there is still ample room for enhancing bilateral trade and cooperation between the two countries.

Investment

Furthermore, Japanese business people and investors may take advantage of the many opportunities that arise in Greece and the surrounding region. It must be mentioned that Greece, with an economic growth higher than that of the EU average, has become the economic hub of Southeast Europe, and offers a stable and healthy economic environment that is supportive of the needs of business and investors.

Greece's advantageous location provides access and opportunities to the neighboring regional markets. Within a radius of 1,000 km there is a mar-

ket of more than 180 million consumers. Greek entrepreneurship has successfully created a network of around 3,500 Greek businesses and 1,000 Greek bank branches in Southeast Europe.

This situation in conjunction with the new Greek Investment Law provides the best possible environment for investors. The new law gives many incentives to potential investors, including cash grants, leasing subsidies, wage subsidies and tax allowances.

Energy, renewable energy

The energy sector is another field that has attracted the interest of investors in Greece in recent years. Greece has liberalized its energy market and has evolved into an energy hub for the whole region. Today, energy represents a significant and dynamic sector of the economy.

Alliances with major European, American and Japanese companies, and oil and gas agreements have positioned Greece as an important country in this field. Greece also offers business leads in the oil and gas market. Oil and natu-

ral gas are transported from Russia and the Caspian Sea to Greece, allowing transmission and distribution into Europe under many competitive advantages, which include government substantiation of future energy investments, a supportive regulatory framework and generous investment incentives, and continued expansion of the energy market for spinoff markets in manufacturing energy technologies, etc.

It is worth mentioning that remarkable headway has been made also in the Renewable Energy Sector (RES). It is one of Europe's fastest-growing areas and promises continued growth for the next decade. Greek demand for RES has produced 750 MW of installed power and this is expected to double by 2010. Since 2002, the annual growth rate of RES is 30 percent to 50 percent and will continue at this rate for three to five years. Investment projections for 2010 are estimated at 2.5 billion euros.

Numerous international energy companies have successfully invested in Greece, and

have expanded and diversified their operations to meet the next wave of demand. Major international players have developed large-scale projects on the Greek islands, combining wind parks with submerged cables connecting the islands to the mainland grid and have deployed sizable units over 5 MW. Furthermore, they have installed capacity for photovoltaic parks, and have identified biomass and biofuels as priority growth areas.

Shipping

Another very important field of cooperation between Greece and Japan is the shipping industry. Greece has the world's biggest mercantile fleet for ships of a gross tonnage over 1,000 tons, and Japan is Greece's second major shipbuilder and the first in preference when it comes to specialized cargo ships (gas tankers, etc.).

Tourism

Last but not least, Greece has always been a favorite tourist destination for people from all over the world. It has a vast historical heritage, and is full of archaeological sites and monuments of distinctive prestige and charm. Seventeen of Greece's archaeological sites and cultural areas have been characterized as Monuments of Cultural Heritage in the UNESCO catalog.

Greece is particularly attractive to tourists with ecological and cultural interests, and the numbers of Japanese tourists visiting Greece have steadily increased over the past years, whereas there has also been a steep increase in the numbers of Greek tourists to Japan (by 42.5 percent in the 2003-2007 period) and the figures would have been even higher if there was a direct flight between Athens and Tokyo.

This article was provided by the Office of Economic and Trade Affairs of the Embassy of Greece.



From the land of Nausicaa: The Corfu Museum of Oriental Art will be sending its Japanese masterpieces to an exhibition at the Edo-Tokyo Museum this summer.

Congratulations
to the People of Greece
on Their Independence Day

Japan-Greece Society

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