

MINISTER EVANGELOS BASSIAKOS SPEECH TO THE JAPANESE MINISTERS FOR THE GREEK AGRICULTURE PRODUCTS

I would like to express my excitement for visiting Tokyo. Japan and Greece have longtime and deeply rooted ties in all fields: political, economic and cultural.

The Athens Olympic Games are an excellent example of the harmonious bilateral relations and the good will on a people to people level. Japan has enjoyed its most successful ever participation in Olympic Games. On the other hand, Greece succeeded in organizing wonderful Olympic Games. At the same time, Greek athletes had also a remarkable success in the Games, including a gold medal in the Japanese sport of JUDO.

In the business field, I should mention the significance of the bilateral cooperation in the shipping and shipbuilding industries and the fact that Japanese products enjoy a very high market penetration in Greece.

Greek exports to Japan are not yet on a satisfactory level, but we believe that our products have a great potential. In particular, Greek agricultural and food products with their excellent quality have brilliant prospects to enter the Japanese market.

Japan has already made remarkable progress in market opening. I am confident that the few remaining issues, such as recognition in Japan of Greek certification bodies for organic products and opening of the Japanese market for Greek meat products, fruits and vegetables, will soon be solved. Furthermore, I would like to urge Japan to speed up the process of modernization of its food additives legislation.

Greece, as a member of the European Union, has been working alongside Japan for the success of the negotiations in WTO. In most issues we share the same concerns and positions, while our understanding is growing in other areas, such as geographic identifications.

Greece has been among the first to declare its participation in EXPO 2005 in Aichi. We aim at a high level participation, which will be combined with parallel cultural and business events. EXPO 2005 is expected to constitute a great chance for further enhancing bilateral relations especially on a people to people level.

Thessaloniki city is candidate for organizing EXPO 2008 under the Theme "Terra Mater – Knowledge of the Earth, Agriculture and Nutrition. It is a Theme of universal interest. Both developed and developing countries show increased interest in issues such as

agriculture, sustainable development, environment, food safety, biotechnology, recycling, etc.

It should be noted that Thessaloniki is the geographical and economic Gateway to South East Europe. In the years to come this area is expected to be one of the fastest developing in the world. Bulgaria and Rumania are going to join the European Union in 2007, while other countries have also European prospects. All this creates a fruitful environment for Japanese business. Japan should take advantage of EXPO 2008 to promote its business, technology, science and culture in this important region.