

Minister's Evangelos Bassiakos Speech to the President of the Japanese Parliament Mr Kono

(H.E. Mr. Yohei KONO, Speaker of the Parliament and Chairman of the Japan – Greece Parliamentarian League of Friendship)

- I would like to convey the best wishes on behalf of the Speaker of the Greek Parliament Professor Mrs. Anna Psarouda – Benakii. Mrs. Benaki would be very happy to welcome Your Excellency in Athens as her official guest under Your Excellency's dual capacity: Speaker of the Japanese Diet and Chairman of the Japan – Greece Parliamentarian League of Friendship.

- Thanking for today's meeting at Your Excellency's Residence I would like to present together with the members of the delegation the comprehensive file of the Greek candidature of the second largest Greek city of Thessaloniki as a site of the EXPO 2008.

- Japan is a friendly country with which Greece shares common values based on the solid background of two ancient civilizations. Greece appreciated also very much the enthusiastic support of the Japanese people to the success of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games. Testimony to that are the extensive bilateral cultural exchanges between our two countries:

- Japan and Greece more particularly have ironed out over the years a close cooperation both bilaterally as well as in the framework of International Organizations. The recent election by the UN General Assembly of both Japan and Greece as non permanent members of the UN Security Council offers a fresh opportunity for a common contribution in addressing critical international problems of our era.

- Japan and Greece maintain as well a dynamic economic partnership, especially in sectors such as shipping, trade, tourism. This upward trend of this relationship will be reflected during the upcoming EXPO 2005 in Aichi. Greece was one of the first countries to declare that it will participate in EXPO 2005 in Aichi.

- The theme of Thessaloniki EXPO 2008 is "Terra Mater – Knowledge of the Earth, Agriculture and Nutrition". It is a theme of particular interest for both developing as well as developed countries ensuring wide participation of visitors and participants.

- Selecting Thessaloniki as the venue of EXPO 2008 conveys a very strong political message. Thessaloniki is a gateway to the Balkans. Furthermore, the strategic position of the city facilitates the economic reconstruction and the development of the Balkans, the broader area of South – Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region via business Opportunities which EXPO 2008 could amply offer. It was not therefore accidental, that all the leaders of the Balkan countries pledged their support for Thessaloniki EXPO 2008 to the Prime Minister of Greece Mr. Karamanlis. Japan is a substantial contributor to the

economic, political and institutional reconstruction of the Balkan Central and Southeastern Europe. Japan is therefore in a better position to realize and support the Greek initiative on the Thessaloniki EXPO 2008.