

Investment is booming in Greece



Greece faces a number of great challenges, in an era of rapid and significant changes. Prosperity and higher living standards, technological advances and consumer rights are the new battlefields in a world where peace and stability are taken for granted. This is today's reality and we cannot remain passive and indifferent observers.

By Christos Folias, Minister of Development

There are five principles that guide policy formation at the Ministry of Development: meritocracy, efficiency, cooperation, transparency, and simplification of procedures. Each new opportunity should be maximized to its full potential, in order to achieve socio-economic and industrial growth in Greece. We are determined to grasp each opportunity.

To begin with, energy is a top policy priority. Our government has outlined a three-fold agenda: enhancement of its international presence, liberalization of the energy market and promotion of environmental-friendly and energy-saving solutions.

Greece is at the crossroads of an international maze of oil, natural gas and electricity networks. For the first time, it has established a key position in the global energy mar-

ket. Via these interconnections, Greece is becoming a strategic energy hub. Specifically, at the end of November, the Turkey-Greece (ITG) natural gas pipeline began operating and was inaugurated. Furthermore the already scheduled extension of this pipeline to Italy will proceed, thus bringing natural gas from the Caspian basin to Italy and beyond. The Burgas-Alexandroupolis oil pipeline is an energy project of crucial importance, involving three countries (Russia, Greece and Bulgaria). The realization of the pipeline will ensure the flow of increasing amounts of oil to international market, to cover the ever-rising needs, while helping relieve the congestion of the Bosphorus straits.

Energy market liberalization is a key priority. Our goal is to reduce legal or administrative barriers in order for com-





panies to enter the market, and to supply gas and electricity to the public. Thus suppliers should have the opportunity to provide services to consumers at prices encouraging competition. Moreover, an open energy market involves safeguarding consumer interests by providing choices as well as business interests, vital for the proper functioning of the EU's internal market and the provision of impetus to competition, innovation and economic development.

Last, but not least, we consider energy saving solutions an integral part of our national energy policy. As regards environmental protection, it is an important factor, which obliges us to find new and better ways to conserve energy and promote the use of renewable energy sources; by providing special financial incentives, we encourage investors to direct their interest towards environment-friendly projects.

In the Industry sector, the Greek legislators drafted a new law concerning "Industrial Parks and Estates". The Government has also simplified the licensing procedures for business start-ups and has offered incentives for specific sectors of the economy.

In Commerce, Greece is streamlining its legislation in line with European Union directives. We are cutting red tape and simplifying day-to-day business operations. An important measure in this direction is the creation of the Registry for Commercial Enterprises.

In terms of enhancing Competitiveness, our policy is based on a very important incentives project, which is called the *Operational Programme for Competitiveness and Entrepreneurship 2007-2013*. The national, private and European funds that will be distributed through this programme to the entire country are estimated to reach 3.21 billion euros. We aim to maximize the financial gains for each euro invested.

In the Research and Development sector, the goal is to foster innovation, research and technology with an entre-

preneurial spirit. At the same time, we continue to build new infrastructure and invest in our human resources, which is one of our greatest national assets. We are also investing in knowledge, excellence, and improving quality standards of both products and services.

Safeguarding the interests of consumers and their right to information is an integral part of our agenda. At our Ministry today, we are guided by the principle that a well-informed consumer is a protected consumer. To this end, we are planning information campaigns to increase awareness and create active and responsible consumers. We are enhancing the "1520 consumer hotline"; we are vesting the mandate of the General Secretariat for the Consumer with new competences; we have created a new unified, objective system for imposing fines for breaches of consumer legislation.

As for SMEs, they constitute the backbone of our economy and we continue to support them. We offer additional financial incentives to small businesses that present comparative advantages and good prospects. We promote business and industrial research, as well as innovation directly, through government subsidies for research programs conducted by enterprises, and indirectly, through the promotion of cooperation between research centres, universities and enterprises.

As one may conclude, while energy is essential to the existence of our global community, research and technology is vital for our future development. Small businesses are the basis of our economy and safeguarding the consumer is an important concern. These issues are integral parts of our central policy, which aims to create an investment-friendly environment for both Greek and foreign enterprises. We envisage growth, prosperity, social cohesion and equal opportunities for all our citizens, guaranteeing them the conditions for maximizing their personal achievement. 