

**QQ: You were recently appointed Minister of Greece and before that you were Minister of Culture for Greece. It is a rare and valuable opportunity for us to be able to address a Minister so new in her position - with a fresh pair of eyes. Tell us Minister what does Travel & Tourism really mean for Greece?**

**Minister Petralia:** First, it is a great honour to be here in Washington, DC, and to be able to address the World Travel and Tourism Conference.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to share with you my point of view on such an interesting topic and be part of such a distinguished group of panelists.

Every year, Greece attracts around 13 million visitors, a number higher than its population.

Tourism contributes 18% to the Gross Domestic Product of the country and more than 10% to the overall employment growth.

More than a major source of income, tourism is a pillar of our national economy, a national competitive advantage in the era of global markets.

**Tourism is one of the fundamental pillars of our economy. An integral part of our entrepreneurial culture, a way of life, for most regions and cities in our country.**

In this perspective, the U.S. market is one of our highest priorities.

We want Americans to visit Greece, to see first-hand the changes my country underwent in preparation for the 2004 Olympic Games and how we combined our unique history and culture with a new array of tourism and leisure opportunities.

Last year alone we saw close to a 20% increase in visitors from the U.S. This is evidence of the appreciation Americans are showing to our increased efforts to improve on our level of service, to provide new kinds of activities and also to the Greek way of life and hospitality, (philoxenia)

**QQ: As a Minister of Government, you have listened to the industry leaders speak of their views on the role of government. What are your views on what they have said? What should be the role of government?**

**MINISTER PETRALIA:** Governments should support tourism growth, not over-regulate, and provide the legislative and regulatory framework that enhances its tourism and leisure proposal while guaranteeing quality of services and goods, providing stability and security. At the same time, governments should also take into consideration other aspects such as the protection of the environment and sustainable growth.

The Greek government has demonstrated its commitment to tourist growth and development by establishing the Ministry of Tourism.

Our responsibility is to provide a long-term and a viable strategy for the growth of our tourism industry.

To solidify a stable institutional framework that will enable the competitive positioning of our national tourist products and services. To offer visitors and investors continuity in all matters relating to tourism.

The opening of borders but at the same time the safety of our country, the rapid advances in communications technology, the steady progress of liberal policies in trade and the evolution of technology, apparent in the development of the means of transportation have all contributed to the growth of the tourist industry in recent years.

We must all focus on making the most of these developments continuing to support the global growth of our industry.

**QQ: Minister, you played a central role in preparing Greece for the Olympics. This must have demanded great public and private sector partnership and collaboration. Can you share with us some of the conclusions which you have drawn out of that rich experience?**

**MINISTER PETRALIA:** As you mentioned, prior to being appointed Minister for Tourism, I was the Minister in charge of the Athens 2004 Olympics, what the International Olympic Committee President Dr. Jacques Rogge described as "Unforgettable, Dream Games".

Essentially what happened in Greece prior to the Olympic Games was probably the most important re-branding exercise a European country has ever undergone.

Beyond the billions invested in infrastructure - new and improved highways, a comprehensive security plan, new subway lines, new sports venues and a new airport -Athens and Greece received positive coverage worth many billions of dollars.

The Olympic Games were broadcasted to a global audience of more than 4 billion people, we welcomed more than 20.000 journalists, 10.500 athletes and hundreds of thousands of officials and visitors.

All these people - either in Greece or abroad - saw the vast changes Athens and Greece underwent through our preparations for the Games.

We managed to combine state-of-the-art development with our historical and cultural heritage.

**Essentially the Games re-positioned Greece in the eyes of the world.**

Since the summer of 2005, we have received an amazing response from the tourism industry worldwide. Visitors to Greece were up by 13% last year and we are expecting the same increase this year as well.

And, the Olympic Games were a 19-day advertisement for our competence, sophistication and security.

Potential investors discovered that Greece has the talent, attitude and infrastructure - besides its European Union membership - in order to compete on equal terms in Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East and Asia.