

## **Welcome Speech**

**Loukas Tsoukalis**

**Zappeio, 19 June 2018**

It is a great honour and a privilege to welcome here today the President of India, The Honourable Ram Nath Kovind, on an official visit to Greece. The President has kindly agreed to address our distinguished audience on the subject of *India and Europe in a Changing World*.

The Honourable Ram Nath Kovind assumed charge of the office of the 14<sup>th</sup> President of India on 25 July 2017. He brings with him a long experience in law and politics. He studied commerce and law and practised at the Delhi High Court and Supreme Court for many years. In 1994, he was elected to the Upper House of the Parliament of India representing the state of Uttar Pradesh. Between 2015 and 2017, he served as Governor of the state of Bihar.

Former Prime Minister of Greece, official representative of the Government of Greece, Ministers, distinguished guests from India, Ambassadors, Members of Parliament, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We welcome the Head of State of the most populous democracy in the world, a country with a very long and glorious history, a country with which Greece's historical ties go very far back. Our two countries are of course very different in size, but in addition to a fully justified pride in the old civilizations they represent, they also share important common values and a common approach to international relations. Liberal democracy, a strong commitment to multilateral cooperation, respect for international institutions and rules are prominent among them. In a rapidly changing world, even more so in our respective regions of the world with unresolved disputes and competing nationalisms, our two countries constitute important factors for stability and peace.

Greeks have always had a strong presence in the arts and sciences, in finance and shipping on the world stage. Here again, there is much in common between Greek and Indian diaspora.

Greece is now emerging from a long and deep economic crisis that was largely, although not entirely, self-inflicted. We have learned lessons from this bitter experience, one of them being that our future prosperity is inextricably linked with an open and competitive economy. Luckily, we have strong assets, notably strategic location, natural resources, a reformed economy and competitive prices, as well as membership of the biggest single market in the world and a strong international currency we share with our European partners. Last but not least, Greece has brainpower and an entrepreneurial spirit that goes back many centuries.

We look at India growing fast and in the process becoming more outward looking. And we would like to invite Indians to discover today's Greece and explore together with us the opportunities that a closer relationship between our two countries can offer.

Mr President, Greece is the first European country you visit. It is a great honour and immense pleasure to welcome you in our country. As a member of the European Union for several decades, Greece has been actively engaged in the common European project. European integration is all about the joint management of ever increasing interdependence and the sharing of sovereignty based on democratic principles and the rule of law. It is indeed a revolutionary political experiment taking place on a continent that had invented sovereignty in the first place, but also a continent with a long history of terrible wars.

The EU and India have a strategic partnership that now needs to move to the next stage. Greece would strongly welcome a much more ambitious and mutually beneficial agreement between the EU and India.

Mr President, we welcome you in Greece and look forward to listening to you. Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, from a very old Sanskrit mantra wishing happiness to all.

I invite you, Mr President, to take the floor.