

LETTER FROM THE PRESS & COMMUNICATION OFFICE OF GREECE IN SYDNEY IN RESPONSE TO YOUR OPINION ARTICLE OF THE 15.09.2011

Editorial Writer SMH
Mr Paul Sheehan
Sydney, 15 September 2011

Dear Sir,

It was to my great surprise, not to say huge discontent, to read your article in today's (15.09.11) SMH titled "Throw out cheating Greece before the rot cripples rest of the world" due to the partial approach to Greece's financial problems.

Before stating some facts about what Greece has achieved during the last two years, allow me to tell you that, connecting the whole of the Greek society to "cheating", is something that is, by far, more than insulting.

Secondly, and as for the "illegal betting and match-fixing" case, please let me remind you that UEFA has sent similar dossiers and is investigating similar cases in many other European countries, so the whole problem does not concern Greece alone. In any case, you say that by June 2011 the Greek government has taken all necessary actions and the results are already there - "two Superleague clubs demoted" etc. This is, and I am sure you will agree with me, a proof that lately in Greece things are really moving towards the right direction.

Thirdly, and as for the "two biggest Olympic stars...turned out to be drug cheats", let me remind you that, of course their career was suspended because of the implementation of the regulation of the "non-show", but a "drug cheat" was never proven and this is why the IOC never stripped them of their medals.

And now to the facts:

In 2010, Greece achieved the largest fiscal adjustment ever achieved by a euro-zone country in a single year. The deficit was reduced by 6 percentage points.

In fact, the data available for the State Budget execution indicate a larger than projected fiscal adjustment. Comparing 2010 to 2009, the State Budget deficit was reduced by 37%, against a targeted annual reduction of 33.2% and brought the fiscal deficit down to 9.4% of GDP.

State budget revenues increased by 7.4% and thus remained within the targets as a result of both increased tax and investment revenues in December 2010. State budget execution data indicate that Greece remains well within the targets of the Economic Policy Program agreed with the EU, the ECB and the IMF in May 2010.

The challenge of course is still there. This is why our efforts are continuing and have been amounting throughout the year. Along with the European Union and the Eurogroup we agreed on a new plan at the end of July and it was only yesterday that the Prime Minister of Greece, Mr George Papandreou, presented to the President of France, Mr Nicolas Sarkozy, and to the Chancellor of Germany, Ms Angela Merkel, all the recently taken measures (extraordinary one-off scale solidarity tax for 2011 and for the next 4 years and one-off scale land tax through the electricity bills for both 2011 and 2012, taxes that will bring back to the Greek state a sum of around 4 billion euros), a development that his two counterparts found sufficient and assuring that Greece is on the right path.

Dear Sir,

I agree with you that tax evasion is one of our biggest problems. This is why for the past two years our focus has been on fighting it the best way possible. But this is not our only concern. The implementation of structural reforms and the active man-

agement of state assets are a huge task also undertaken during the last two years and please allow me to be more specific on the measures that are implemented towards these goals:

- The state-owned enterprises are put under new laws that ensure transparency, accountability and restriction on the wage expenditure.

- Reforms on the labor market, i.e. firm-level agreements, revision of the mediation and arbitration system, reduction in the over-time payment for part-time jobs, opening of the so-called "closed professions" to create real competition are also happening already.

- * The human resources in the general government are now put under a state of evaluation, whereby thousands of public workers will first get into a status of employed reserve and after 12 months the staff, that will be considered as supplementary, will be laid off - you should not forget that, first time ever, a census was conducted in 2010 in order to find out the real volume of employment in the central and the general government. Furthermore, to control its volume and its dynamics, the rule of 1 recruitment for 5 or more retirements is implemented in the whole public sector, a rule that applies also to secondments from entities of the general government to the central government.

- We have come to an agreement with our European counterparts on a large real estate and asset privatisation program, where state-owned entities, such as the hellenic posts, ports, marinas, gas network, national railways are being privatized - there is the so-called "fast track law", as well, that accelerates the procedures, especially for foreign companies willing to invest in Greece.

- The above-mentioned reforms can really bring our country out in the light along with the valuable infrastructure that we inherited from the Athens Olympic Games, our thriving shipping industry, our tourism sector, that has known a significant increase during the first semester of 2011 (the usual fruitful summer months are not included), our agriculture (that saw a 9% increase of the people occupied in it during 2010) and its internationally well-famed and recognized dairy products, olive oil and wines and also our new regional administration system with only 13 regions, more transparent and more manageable.

Dear Sir,

Allow me to tell you that when you say that "the Greeks are being forced into a humiliating and unsustainable austerity program" once again you are not being fair towards the Greek people nor to the Greek government.

The measures adopted in a single year (2010) were unseen in the past of the whole euro-zone. The sacrifice of the Greek people was immense but, in the end, it will be beneficial for the future of our country.

At the same time, I really cannot understand why you claim in such an oversimplifying way that "the root cause of the problem (dragging down the value of Australian citizens superannuation)" is Greece, when I am sure, given your experience, you are fully aware that the World Economic Crisis started longer ago and obviously elsewhere, let alone the fact that for the past two years speculators and CDS continued to make huge profits out of the thousands of scenarios that are still going around about the Greek economy and not only. It was myself at the beginning of this letter who de-

scribed and admitted Greece's chronic structural problems: Excessive expenditures, mismanagement, unregulated labor market, obsolete pension system, tax evasion, oversized public sector etc. But, seriously, how can you sustain that a national debt which is one tenth of the equivalent debt of the EU's largest economy and forty times less than the one on the other side of the Atlantic, can be the only reason for a crisis spread worldwide over the past five years? It sounds like the saying "the mouse roared and the lion ran off".

Reiterating my strong belief that you had no intention to offend or misinform any of your readers - a practice of another kind of journalism of a past era - and taking for granted the huge respect that your newspaper shows towards the freedom of speech, I would expect nothing less of you than the publication of this letter the sooner possible (by the way, our office has already received several complaints by Greek-Australians who even stressed that they found your article "insulting and defamatory for Greece", to say the least).

Always looking forward to working fruitfully with SMH and assuring you once more that we are at your disposal for any future request, please accept my sincere regards.

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More notably, the author's singling out the overemphasised statements about the Hellenic Football Federation and "illegal betting and match-fixing" should not be treated lightly; it was shown throughout reports that the UEFA sent similar dossiers and investigated similar cases in other European countries. The author's attempt to victimise Greece in this development, underlines his prejudice.

Moreover, in regards to the author's comments about the "two biggest Olympic stars... turn[ing] out to be drug cheats",

this was never proven. Yes, actions were taken as a result of the implementation of the regulation of the "non-show", however drug charges, as claimed by the author, were, in fact, never forthcoming; as a result, the IOC did not take further actions (such as stripping them of their medals). What is more evident is re-visiting such serves no other purpose but to malign Greece as a nation. How pathetic!

The author goes on to state that "the Greeks are being forced into a humiliating and unsustainable austerity pro-

gram", thus hoping to (once again) add to his collection of negative implications towards Greece and its people. In actual fact, the measures adopted by the Greek Government in 2010 were unique to the Euro-zone as a whole. This obviously has and does provide challenges for the Greek people, however, measures such as those that have been implemented by the Greek Government will be beneficial to overcoming this economic hurdle. Perplexingly, and what is more concerning is the author's attempt to somehow connect

and emphasise (sic) the correlation (?) between the current economic crisis in Greece and the decreasing "value of Australian citizens' superannuation". This again, directs a racial hullabaloo to readers. What must be highlighted is that the author's statements are negligent and economically wrong.

To blame Greece for decreases in Australian superannuation is just deplorable. The world economic crisis started years ago as a result of a plethora of factors, including the sub-prime mortgage loans in the USA,

over-borrowing etc, etc, as reported widely in the international media, including the SMH. Most importantly, the Australian Hellenic Council (Vic) demands that Sheehan's bile, in the guise of commentary, be retracted as it is, in accordance with the law, racially vilifying.

Yours Sincerely,
Peter Jasonides
Victorian Coordinator
Australian Hellenic Council
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