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Symposium organized by Biopolitics International Organization in Athens

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Civic leaders, business executives, scholars and diplomats from Greece and Turkey met in Athens, on February 9, 2004, to discuss important issues in international cooperation. The initiative was themed "Hellenic-Turkish Cooperation in Biopolitics – On the Road to European Union Ideals" and was organized by the President and Founder of the Biopolitics International Organisation (B.I.O.), Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis, under the auspices of the Ambassador of Turkey, Mr. Yigit Alpogan. The meeting convened with great success at the Office of the European Parliament and the National Bank of Greece.

Following the success of previous conferences and symposia in Istanbul (1992), Ankara (1997), Trabzon (1989, 1993), Adana (1995) and Athens (1990), which focused on Hellenic-Turkish cooperation and strengthened the friendship between the two nations, B.I.O. hosted the current event in an attempt to promote bio-diplomacy, education, and environmental governance as the needed vision for the future. Threats to the environment are international problems, and the required solutions entail collaboration and understanding among all nations. The role of culture, education and policy with respect to the environment are crucial in making the world a safer and more equitable place.

During the morning session at the Office of the European Parliament, B.I.O. President Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis thanked Ambassador Alpogan for his support and expressed the hope that the meeting would provide a forum for the promotion of dialogue and cooperation in the most consequential task, that of preserving the environment and bios – life – on our planet. "Arrogance and disrespect have led humanity to the edge of a cliff. International cooperation and bio-diplomacy, as proposed since 1985 by B.I.O., can inspire a new vision in society and lead to a future of hope. New ethics, with the environment at the core of every endeavour, can help us to overcome negative stereotypes and build a truly civil society, where respect for all life will constitute the primary asset."

George Cassimatis, Director of the European Parliament Representation in Greece, hailed B.I.O.'s initiative and highlighted the importance of the meeting within the framework of the general spirit of Hellenic-Turkish friendship and cooperation. He also highlighted the international character of environmental problems and the need for cooperation between Greece and Turkey in finding solutions.

The Ambassador of Turkey expressed his appreciation of the devoted efforts of the Biopolitics International Organization, which he considers a noble cause. As a diplomat, he highlighted the importance of the meeting and noted that Greece and Turkey have enjoyed very fruitful relations over the last five years. "Turkey has been assisted by Greece in complex and complicated EU matters, and there has been extensive collaboration in many and diverse fields within the framework of the European Union. There is a sustained process of negotiations between the two countries, in order to resolve past differences, and, once both sides are ready to overcome dividing issues, bilateral relations will improve and there will hardly be any issue left for politicians or technocrats to ponder over. In the field of business, tax cuts have created new opportunities for the business communities in both countries. In the field of the environment, universities are developing many and diverse joint projects."

Professor Rusen Keles, leading scholar and diplomat, distinguished B.I.O. Trustee and founding member, remarked that, thanks to the dedication and outstanding leadership of its President and Founder, the Biopolitics International Organization has expanded to include 124 countries. "When the UN Commission on Environment and Development, headed by former Norwegian Prime Minister Brundtland, made public its discovery of the method of sustainable development in 1986, we, as the founders of B.I.O, were already discussing its implications for our nations in Athens. When the first B.I.O. Hellenic-Turkish meeting took place in 1990, the UN Summit in Rio de Janeiro had not yet happened."

Panayotis Koutsikos, Chairman of the Hellenic-Turkish Chamber of Commerce, noted that commercial relations between Greece and Turkey have greatly improved over the past four years. "In 1999, business transactions between the two countries totalled 200 million dollars and reached 1.2 billion dollars by 2003. The signing of a treaty cancelling double taxation further enhanced commercial relations. However, economic development is inadvertently related to environmental problems. "

Professor Constantine Stephanou of the Department of International and European Studies at Panteion University, emphasized that the present meeting constitutes an appropriate and timely initiative for both countries, which have worked hard over the recent years to create a positive climate and to resolve their political differences.

Professor Nicholas Markatos, former Rector of the National Technical University of Athens, expressed his support of the B.I.O. initiative to enrich the Olympic Games with concepts other than athletics, including concern for people with disabilities and environmental issues. "Pollution is an international problem and provides fertile ground for the development of bio-diplomacy.

University of Ankara Professor Berna Alpagut, highlighted the importance of bio-education as a bridge of cooperation between all peoples of the world.

Professor Zafer Erturk, Rector of the East Mediterranean University, an institution with over 35,000 students, remarked that an open European area for higher learning carries a wealth of positive perspectives, with respect to diversity, but which also requires a continuous effort to remove barriers and to develop a framework for teaching and learning that enhances close cooperation.

Istanbul University Professor Ersi Abaci Kalfoglu focused on the importance of international cooperation in organised crime prevention. She noted that, within the framework of European integration, Greece and Turkey can work together to combat crime and improve quality of life.

At the conclusion of the morning session, Olympic champion Christos Papanikolaou, declared that Greek Olympic champions fully support the Biopolitics International Organization, a global effort in defence of the environment.

The Symposium's afternoon session convened at the National Bank of Greece with the participation of many distinguished speakers. Discussions were chaired by B.I.O. President, Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis, and Professor Rusen Keles, and focused on the following themes: International cooperation and bio-diplomacy; Environmental education; Business and the media; Agriculture and rural development; An environmental vision in governance.

The session opened with an exchange of ideas on the pivotal role of bio-diplomacy as a vehicle for international cooperation and peace. On behalf of the Chairman and CEO of the Hellenic Telecommunications Organization, Lefteris Antonacopoulos, Chief Technology Officer and Hellas Sat Chairman, George Argyropoulos, congratulated the B.I.O. President for her vision and tireless efforts for a better future for all, and emphasised that Biopolitics helps in the creation and expression of the common interests of nations by replacing confrontation with cooperation.

OTEnet Managing Director, George Ioannidis, stressed that Biopolitics can help society to overcome selfish and short-sighted attitudes in favour of a long-term strategy of environmental harmony and hope.

Deputy Mayor of Athens, Professor Kelly Bourdara, greeted the participants on behalf of the Mayor and noted that, in the quest of a new vision in public administration, quality of life, hope and harmony are the building blocks of the environment that we should wish to achieve. "Athens is a city with great responsibility. The past, alone, without a good strategy for the present and a vision for the future, cannot lead to the changes we desire. Today, the present is enriched by this meeting, and we would like to work closely with all the participants in the quest for hope and peace. The 2004 Olympic Games are a great moment for our city. In the context of Olympic values, we would like to warmly support today's meeting of cooperation. The environment, as promoted by the Biopolitics International Organisation, can become the core of a balanced and hopeful society."

Alejandro Diaz, Ambassador of Mexico said "Mexico, is committed to enhancing environmental protection fully aware of the challenges concerning sustainable development, such as clean water management, forest protection, sound agricultural practices, responsible trade, implementation of renewable energy sources, care of wetlands, effective pollution control and also the promotion of ecotourism."

Nicholas Papageorgiou, President of the Hellenic National Commission for UNESCO, noted that, in order to preserve the environment in the manner in which the Biopolitics International Organization envisages, technology and the arts need to join forces and contribute to a society of peace.

Stefanos Costopoulos, Chairman of the American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce, noted that, as Turkey prepares itself for EU membership, it is eligible for a variety of funds to upgrade infrastructure, the environment and its financial systems. "Greece, as an EU member, has the experience of knowing the hows and whys of many of these programs. The United States also offers know-how that is very often the best available. The current level of trade between Greece and Turkey is 800 million dollars and will soon reach 1 billion dollars. We believe that this level could increase by another 20%, if more synergies are created so that Greece and Turkey become not only trading partners, but trading hubs, transport hubs, and tourism hubs. "

ABN AMRO Asset Management CEO, Stathis Nazos, discussed the role of the media and business as reflectors of societal values. "The media disseminate information to the public. Their primary objective is to present unbiased information. How can this be achieved? Only if there is a true separation of the media and business."