Athens, 7.11.2019

**"GREECE 2021" – Inauguration ceremony**

**CONSTANTINE AN. TASSOULAS**

**(President of the Hellenic Parliament):**

Your Excellency, President of the Republic,

Honourable Prime Minister,

Your Eminence, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece,

Madam President of the Committee "Greece 2021",

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are gathered here today to launch Greece's preparation, as laid down by law, for the Bicentennial of the National Revival (Palingenesia). We are gathered here to solemnly inaugurate the work of the “Greece 2021” Committee at the premises of the Hellenic Parliament, in the Senate Hall. 200 years ago another national Assembly, under much more primitive conditions, that were, nonetheless, more interesting and more dynamic, declared our country’s independence.

Let us revisit the Assembly where the speech for Greece’s Independence was articulated, through an epic work by Athanassios Petsalis-Diomidis, “Greek Matins”, identified as a lyric poem by Κonstantinos Tsatsos.

“The way the faintest hint of joy can shine through the pain, so can a few days of summer sneak into the heart of winter. And so it has come to pass, in the twelve days from the end of 1821 to the dawn of 1822, from Christmas to Saint John's and the Feast of the Epiphany. Piada is what the locals call the village, the scholars call it Epidaurus, and all the learned men of Greece have gathered here, the great chieftains, all the local leaders, the leaders of the revolution, they've gathered in a National Assembly, the Moraites, the Roumeliotes and the islanders and those who came from afar to help with the struggle as soon as the call for the nation to rise up was heard.

They convene under the blossomed orange trees, those who have come from the provinces of the revolution and they debate and claim and decide to establish a state, a central administration for all of Greece, that will guide the struggle. And so they walk towards Piada, on horseback, mules and donkeys, not en masse, but in small numbers, not to cause a commotion, they set out at 3 in the morning, it is still dark and cold, to Epidaurus they go, passing through Ligourion, each of them accompanied by their people, 3 or 5 or 15 people at a time, well-armed, well- protected, just in case, from enemies, from friends, one never knows.

So this is how things stand, and they sit and discuss, under the orange trees, loaded with oranges they are, the clergy in black robes, the local leaders, the affluent ones in their white *foustanelles*, their gold encrusted vests and red *fezes*, wrapped in thick black capes, islanders with black wide pants and red belts, and one or two dressed the western way. Mavrokordatos is the one covering his shoulders with rustic white flokati rugs. They keep one warm. It is December.

Today, it's New Year’s Day, the first day of the month, a great day it is, since the revolutionaries go first to church for the Divine Liturgy and then huddled like bees, under the orange trees, they gather in their usual meeting place and sit down on a few benches, most of them, however, sit cross-legged on the ground, on sheepskin and cloaks, in an orderly fashion, like well-behaving schoolboys, respecting the rules – yes, there are rules at the time and they are obeyed by all! - which dictate everyone's specific position. They have their own spots, the ones from the Peloponnese, the ones from Western Greece, from Eastern Greece, the islanders. And each group has its own order of signing the Assembly’s decisions.

The strangest thing is that they all respect the Assembly’s President, Mr. Alexandros Mavrokordatos, because they are all aware that what they are doing is very serious, momentous, a national work of great importance and of extreme urgency, a work that cannot be postponed, as danger is nigh. They all sit down again and then the President, Alexandros Mavrokordatos, stands up and reads out, slowly, in a deep and clear voice, highlighting every single word, the Preamble of Greece’s Provisional Constitution. He has drafted it the night before, on New Year’s Eve.

“In the name of the Holy and Indivisible Trinity, the Greek Nation, under the atrocious Ottoman Rule, unable to bear oppression any longer and shaking off the yoke of tyranny with great sacrifices, declares today through its legal representatives gathered in a national Assembly before God and the people, its political existence and independence. In Epidaurus on the 1st of January 1822, the first year of Independence".

No one applauds, nobody moves, no one speaks, they rise and stand at attention. They can feel how significant the moment is. After the President signs first, he invites everyone to come and sign in the order decided by lots, namely the Eastern Greeks, then the islanders, the Western Greeks, and finally the Moraites.

They struggle to carve their name on the paper, bent over the table as they are, holding the feather with their callused fingers, staining the paper with their tears. It is almost noon, the light shines on the trees, as if through a sieve, the foliage remaining shaded underneath; an orange falls out from a loaded orange tree and rolls to the ground.

Greece has signed its independence in a primitive Assembly and today, modern Greece, in these modern premises, launches an endeavour, a unique one - the next one will take place in a hundred years - to showcase its value, its history and culture, not to cling to the virtuous acts of our forefathers, but to view this value, the history and the culture, as a springboard that will make us equal to the most advanced countries in the world.

In 1957, at the first UN Political Committee, in the midst of the struggle for independence in Cyprus, Greece was accused of pursuing an expansionist territorial Great Idea. The then Foreign Minister, the late Evangelos Averof-Tositsas, took the floor and said, “Indeed we are pursuing the realization of the Great Idea, but in a different way; we are seeking to create a state equal to the most advanced countries in the world and we have begun to do so by leaving “psorokostaina” (destitute Greece) behind.

And we are indeed creating it, because if, say, today, in 1957, there was a world opera competition, certainly Greece would receive the first prize, because the Orchestra Director would be Mitropoulos, Maria Callas would be the Soprano, the New York Metropolitan Opera's Moschonas would be the Baritone and Paschalis from the Scala di Milano would be the Tenor!”

This is the embryonic Greece we see reflected in old UN minutes. It is waiting for us, to have learned from the message of 1821, to complete the task and make it equal to the most advanced countries in the world.

The year 1821 was not only marked by acts of outstanding heroism, such as the battle of Salona, the liberation of Vostitsa – modern day Egion *Αίγιον* – or the liberation of Kalamata, or the Hani Gravias, and the burning of the Turkish warship in Eressos, but also by profound political acts, which, combined with heroism, produced history.

In 1821, when Greece announced what I mentioned earlier, ie when it declared its provisional constitution, at the same time we also announced that our cause was national and it was far from any demagogic or insurgent pursuit.

That statement was communicated to the known world at the time, across Europe, even published in the US. But why did Mavrokordatos add that “we are not engaged in insurgent pursuits?" Out of political motivation, to mitigate concerns among Europe's reactionaries, to clarify that this was not an act of insurgence, nor of subversion, it was a national struggle, leading to liberation and a smooth integration into the international system.

It was that mixture of heroism and political sense that finally brought about the freedom of the country; moreover, the combination of the incredible fighting spirit of the Greeks with the unique skill of political representatives, was what, against all odds, civil wars and overall strife notwithstanding, eventually led to liberation.

Mavrokordatos' skill lies in his having foreseen from the beginning, that sooner or later George Canning would realize that English trade interests in the eastern Mediterranean coincided with Greek independence and freedom.

“Canning was proceeding very slowly," writes Chris Woodhouse in his famous book on the Greek struggle for liberation.

The main step was the naval blockade endorsement, thus facilitating the loan. The dissolution of the Levant Company and the Protocol of Petersburg in 1826, but, above all, the Treaty of London in 1827, concluded by France, Russia and England, ignoring objections by Prussia and Austria, and the Protocol of 1827 paved the way for liberation, calling for peace in Greece, for the sake of trade that was the British Empire’s top priority at the time; if peace was not achieved, then an armistice could be imposed by the major powers.

So, it was political skill, boundless heroism but luck as well, because Canning died of pneumonia just one month after the signing of the London Protocol. It is noteworthy that in 1827 Britain had four prime Ministers (Lord Liverpool, George Canning, The Viscount Goderich, and The Duke of Wellington); Canning happened to be in office at the crucial moment in July 1827 to sign the precursors of Greek independence. Canning had served as Governor of India and as a loyal servant of the British Empire strongly believed in freedom of trade, when most countries at that time were in favour of protectionism. On the other hand, a struggling, bleeding and writhing Greece, had the heroism and political sense to be on the right side of history.

These are the factors that will help us stay there, on the right side of history, honouring the message coming out of 1821 and striving to become equal to most advanced countries.

I would like to sum up revisiting what Pericles said in his Funeral Oration “ I shall speak first of our ancestors who gave us a free state”. Inspired by the ancestors, just like we are inspired by 1821, Pericles crafted all the glory, all the achievements of Athenian democracy by saying " we live under a form of government which does not emulate”, "we are different” or, according to another translation, which I prefer, “we are superior”.

Out of respect for the ancestors, he spoke of the superiority of the Athenian Republic that they built themselves.

Similarly, we are here today to undertake this great mission. This statutory committee with its Chairwoman, under the supervision of the Prime Minister himself, with its Executive Committee, with its plenary, in cooperation with the Hellenic Parliament, and its Foundation for Parliamentarism and Democracy, which, since April 2019, has issued some remarkable publications, and has engaged in outstanding conference and research activities on 1821, all of us together will be crafting the new frieze ahead of 2021.

The most unexpected innovation appears on the Parthenon Frieze. While usually the architectural parts of temples depicted wars, which is the case of the Parthenon Metopes, on the Frieze the Athenians presented the procession of the Panathenians to illustrate creative life and joie de vivre as a great, momentous achievement, similar to the struggle of war.

Therefore, we are a nation that will celebrate and prepare for the 200 years of our revival, a nation that in the year in question, in 2021, will illustrate that our Frieze is facing the Metopes of the heroic struggles and is preparing the country for the great joie de vivre, a life of creation and progress in honour of the struggles passed.

Thank you.