

Opening Ceremony Athens International Airport Eleftherios Venizelos on March 27, 2001

**Address by Dr.-Ing. Dr.-Ing. E.h. Hans-Peter Keitel, Chairman of the Executive
Board**

03/27/2001

Valid only as spoken.

Excellencies, Eminence, Ladies and Gentlemen,

An airport is not simply a structure like any other.

An airport has a special flair to it. It opens a gateway to the world. It stands for mobility – and thus for freedom. It lets man's ancient dream of flying become reality. That dream is one whose roots are to be found in Greek mythology, with the story of Icaros and Daedalos. We all know that that story did not have a good outcome – and so in that respect it forms a complete contrast to the story of success which has brought us together here today.

Athens International Airport Eleftherios Venizelos has distinctive features that set it off from any other airport in the world.

It was given birth by the courage of the Greek people and the Greek government. They have demonstrated how worthwhile it is to take paths that no-one has trodden before. The Greek government took the decision to realize this airport in public-private partnership organized in a fully private enterprise – a decision that led to the world's largest international airport project ever completed on the basis of private-sector financing.

The joint path of HOCHTIEF, ABB and Fraport with the Greek state does not come to an end with this ceremony here today. Design and planning, financing and building – this was just the beginning. Today sees the start of a new and equally important chapter in our cooperation: the operation of this airport.

As a successful example of public-private partnership, Eleftherios Venizelos has something of the nature of a "prototype" – exerting an influence well beyond the borders of Greece itself. The "Greek model" can and should serve as an example for other states, especially those of the European Union. Throughout our continent, the need for major infrastructure projects is huge – the result of increasing levels of transport and traffic, of booming tourism, of growing streams of trade, and open borders. Everywhere in Europe there is a need for

renewal and expansion.

The "Greek model" has also highlighted what the decisive factors are in cooperation between private companies and the public sector in infrastructure projects on this scale. One of these factors is mutual trust, another is the joint desire to create something great. And in our case, both sides have also benefited from planning together right from an early stage, and from the readiness to provide prompt information on changing parameters.

I have referred already to this airport's "distinctive features" – and I am sure that in this context you will allow me to mention the great achievement of HOCHTIEF and its partners, who built Eleftherios Venizelos in record time. This would not have been feasible without the productive cooperation of Greek firms – they, after all, were responsible for more than 80 percent of the works. This means that the construction of this airport has given an important impetus to this region's economy.

It is all too easy to forget one crucial thing: the fact that people have made this success possible – people in companies and authorities, people in the government. It is they who have seen Athens International Airport as their project – and who said: "I want this idea to become reality".

Projects such as this airport need the vigor and the persistence of the many busy hands on the building site and of the people in positions of responsibility. It is impossible to name all those who were committed and have contributed to this success. In lieu of all members of the different governments during this period I would like to express our sincere thanks to you, Mr. Prime Minister. We are very grateful for your support on which we have always been able to rely.

I should like to thank four individuals who have guided the destiny of the airport company so far: the two chairmen of the Supervisory Board, Anastasios Tzavelas in the early phase and then Dr. Haris Stamatopoulos, as well as the Chief Executive Officer, until last year, Dr. Jörg Schill, and today's CEO Dr. Matthias Mitscherlich.

And please allow me to address two more personalities who have been the motors of this project for years, who have not only invested time and effort but also heart and soul: Minister Costas Laliotis and Dr. Reinhard Kalenda, Head of HOCHTIEF AirPort.

Together with many others, they have laid the foundations for what the airport Eleftherios Venizelos is to become: a highly modern, innovative and efficient hub of transport in South-Eastern Europe.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to all who are involved in this magnificent project, those whom I have mentioned by name and the many hundreds who remain unnamed. Every single one of them has played his or her part in the success of this giant project.

**CORPORATE
COMMUNICATIONS**

Opernplatz 2
45128 Essen, Germany
Tel.: +49 201 824-2642
Fax: +49 201 824-2585
presse@hochtief.de

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The future of this airport now lies in the hands of AIA. For the airport industry, this company is a signpost company and can thus serve as a frontrunner for similar projects in Greece and beyond. But AIA is even more than that: it is an example of how effectively international cooperation can function if all those concerned work shoulder to shoulder and are prepared to jointly overcome any initial difficulties. In such circumstances, the difference between cultures does not mean separation but cross-fertilization. Under such conditions, colleagues become friends.

Being in Greece, the birth place and the next host country of one of the biggest events worldwide, I would like to offer a similar cooperation of Greek creativity and German efficiency whenever it may be appropriate. We are ready to serve.

I would now like to wish AIA every success and good fortune in operating this airport in the next 25 years. May it always steer just the right course – in line with those cautionary words of Daedalos to his son Icaros:

"Too low, and the waves will wet your plumes,
too high, and the sun the melting wax consumes."

I am sure that AIA will get off right from the start and maintain exactly the right altitude!

(Translation)

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