

OPENING ADDRESS

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Distinguished members of the Academy,

Distinguished representatives of the maritime industries,

It is a special honour to be invited to attend and address a short speech at today's Inauguration of the Greek Shipping Hall of Fame and thank you to the organisers for that. Supporting Greek shipping and its public image, and safeguarding its achievements, are goals that are practical, necessary and far more useful than vapid pronouncements that often are not acted upon. So I congratulate the Greek Shipping Hall of Fame for adopting these aims.

This evening not only marks the start of the Hall of Fame. This evening honours some of the foremost and excellent names of Greek shipping.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, everything is evaluated under the black veil of the international economic and social crisis which, certainly, has an impact on global shipping as much as Greek shipping. In the demanding world of international commerce this crisis affects even the most traditional and respected international shipping centres.

In this area, the reputation, prestige and bargaining power of our shipping remain intact and strong. If we want to understand why this is so, we need to study our maritime progress from mythology to history.

It is important for generations of Greeks to get to know it. To know exactly what Greek 'seamanship' means. From the Greece of Poseidon, Jason and Odysseus, to the eminent shipping personalities of Greece today. The contribution of shipping to the national product, to the balance of trade, and to employment fills us with pride and - in these difficult economic conditions - gives us hope.

Behind this record there is long tradition and the people who worked hard to take advantage of it. People who stood up for Greek credibility wherever their ships voyaged. People who care about the problems of the land of their birth and their fathers. Benefactors of their country, sometimes openly, sometimes invisibly.

And I would like these people to be an example for my children. Sometimes the conditions lead us off track and we forget to reward them. Today is a beginning. We publicly recognise their work and introduce an institution specifically for this. To honour the distinguished Greeks of our maritime country. Examples for future generations to follow.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It was remiss that a Shipping Hall of Fame did not exist in Greece before this. The legends of cinema live in Los Angeles, the legends of sport across the world, but the legends of shipping are Greeks – names that live on, not only in our country but internationally. A Hall of Fame for our industry, though, is not only a tribute to the past. It is also recognition for Greeks who continue to be among the leaders in a tough field of global competition. For the Greeks of our shipping industry, the shipowners but also our seafarers.

As proud as a Greek feels when the ends of the earth know of Onassis, so we all feel proud seeing the other hero that belongs in the Hall of Fame - the Unknown Seaman. In Andros, in Kardamila... wherever he stands and waves.

Dear friends,

Your contribution is indisputable. And today it is needed more than ever. So I want to congratulate the organizers for this evening. It only remains to wish the Hall of Fame to become an institution worthy of its creators and the principles it stands for.

Thank you.