

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE & EMPLOYMENT
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SPEECH OF HIS EXCELLENCY, MR. A. POLITIS, LEADER OF
THE GREEK DELEGATION AT THE PLENARY SESSION OF THE
CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND EMPLOYMENT

Mr. President, Gentlemen,

The Greek delegation would like to begin by thanking the Cuban Government very warmly for its hospitality. It seems almost that this Conference has been convened in Havana so that Havana's charms might help us to forget prosai^c economic problems.

Gentlemen, as you know Greece has taken no part in drafting the Charter which we are to consider. None the less, the provisions of the Charter are in conformity with the ideas which we have always held in our country. Sailors and tradesmen, living in a small and poor country, Greeks have always derived their subsistence from foreign trade. In proportion to population and the country's resources, the volume of our foreign trade was always greater than that of other larger countries. The Greek people, therefore, will accept and approve any plan which would reduce or abolish obstacles which prevent the expansion of international trade. We of the Greek delegation will do everything possible to help in the attainment of the purposes laid down in the Charter.

The most interesting aspect of the Charter, in our opinion, is that the abolition of trade barriers is connected with the idea of greater solidarity among nations. The authors of the Charter must have understood that greater freedom of economic exchange could never be attained unless more economically developed States were prepared to help those whose resources were as yet undeveloped. In a free economy no country can hope to attain full employment and higher and stable standards of living unless similar progress is made in other countries. What would it profit a country to increase employment if this were to bring about a decrease of employment

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in other countries and an economic crisis which sooner or later would be felt all over the world? It seems that the Chapters of the Charter dealing with employment and economic development attempt to deal with these problems. However, the provisions laid down in these chapters should be made more clear and specific, in order to emphasize further the close ties between international solidarity and the freedom of economic exchange, because without these close ties there will never be real free trade.

The idea of the economic interdependence of nations has already been consecrated by the very generous help which the United States of America is giving to my country, devastated by war and a long period of enemy occupation, and by the help which the United States is going to offer Europe in accordance with the Marshall Plan.

There is another aspect of the economic interdependence of nations which must not be forgotten. The reduction of customs tariffs and restrictions will certainly increase international trade, but it will have one other result. It will increase the effects of economic fluctuations. This will increase the responsibility of the great industrial and commercial States.

Further, the Charter lays down certain rules concerning freedom of exchange and it provides for a great number of exceptions, some of which will be permanent and others, of a provisional nature, will apply only in the period of transition between the time when the Charter comes into force and the time when its objectives have been attained.

The Greek delegation believes that possibly not enough attention has been given to this period of transition, on which the attainment of the purposes laid down in the Charter depends. We believe that if the problems of this transition period are given due weight, freedom of economic exchange will become a reality all the sooner. We believe that it is not enough to sanction a few exceptions in the text of the Charter; provision must be made for laying down ad hoc rules and regulations. Only thus, keeping in close touch with reality, we shall be able to

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attain the purposes of the Charter which are common to all of us.

May I once more use my country as an example? No European State has suffered as much as Greece during and even after the war. The Country has been completely devastated and its economic system is entirely dislocated at present.

We need a long period of convalescence. If we were to abandon suddenly the commercial policy which we have been following and are still following, the result of such an action would be very serious, both from the point of view of our fiscal resources and budgetary balance, and from the point of view of national production which, in view of the present economic situation in Greece, is needed today more than ever. Such a change in our commercial policy would greatly reduce employment, which of course would be contrary to the purposes of the Charter.

Insofar as our foreign trade is concerned, Greece is forced to buy a great number of products abroad. In order to pay for our imports, we must export agricultural products (tobacco, currants, oils, wines, etc.) which in the international market are considered luxuries. Tobacco is the most important of these products. The value of tobacco exports covers almost all the imports of foodstuffs needed by the population. About nine hundred thousand people, with their families, or one-seventh part of the total population of Greece, are engaged in the cultivation and trade of tobacco.

Until now Greece has always found it possible to place certain quantities of its tobacco in foreign countries by means of special provisions in bilateral agreements. This is for us a vital need. If we were to change this system suddenly, thousands of my compatriots would be unemployed.

We hope, therefore, that the members of this Conference will give due consideration to my statement when they lay down the rules to govern the period of transition on which we believe the whole structure

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of the Charter must be laid.

It is better to go slowly, by successive stages, always keeping in close touch with reality, than to try to provide today in detail for everything that may arise in the future. Let us not forget the Bretton Woods Agreement, which by the force of circumstances has failed to fulfil the hopes of its authors. Insofar as possible, let us draw up flexible rules to govern this period of transition, the duration of which cannot today be foreseen. In short, let us be optimistic but let us be realistic too.

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