

Dear delegates,

Honorary guests,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the South Aegean Region for the honorary invitation to today's event.

It is an extremely great honour for me to stand before you, as president of the largest body of the Dodecanese, representing more than 25.000 members who live, work, operate on our islands.

Our Chamber has stood and stands by all efforts aimed at enhancing the competitiveness and extroversion of businesses, both at local and European level, always with particular emphasis on dialogue.

In its more than 70 years of operation, our Chamber provides:

- VALID AND IMMEDIATE INFORMATION to the entrepreneurs-members of the Chamber and all interested parties in regards to entrepreneurship, taxation, investment, operation, etc.
- THE SERVICE OF THE GENERAL COMMERCIAL REGISTER of all legal forms of enterprises in Greece, which contributes to the monitoring of commercial enterprises by the state and the better service of the companies themselves by the central administration and the competent bodies.
- THE ONE STOP SERVICE, which facilitates the formation of companies, avoids red tape, time-consuming procedures and hassle.
- PERSONAL CONSULTING, in terms of procedures, extroversion, approach to new markets and others
- SUBSIDIES - FINANCIAL TOOLS. We contribute to companies' access to financing programs for their investment projects from national and/or community resources.

Since 1949, we have been formulating specific positions, making a number of interventions, demanding solutions, intervening where we consider it is necessary, for the benefit of our islands and their economy, which is being tested by the pandemic, as is also the case around the world.

That is the challenge, but it's also the opportunity. To create an investment environment not only favorable for the days ahead, but also innovative. Indeed, South Aegean offers a sea of opportunities and the road to their utilization has already been opened wide and even in the midst of the pandemic.

In the Dodecanese, the pioneering project to transform Astypalaia into the first smart and “green” island of the Mediterranean with energy autonomy, in cooperation with the Greek government and the Volkswagen Group, is under way, an investment of up to 20 million euros.

On the island of Chalki, Citroen is in the process of electrifying the island's fleet in conjunction with the development of innovative telecommunications services and technological applications, spearheaded by the development of 5G infrastructure and broadband networks and the implementation of “smart” solutions in the island's energy and transport networks.

The private initiative design of three French companies, Citroen, Akuo Energy and Vinci Energie for the implementation of green development, includes other islands such as Symi, Agathonisi, Kastellorizo and others.

It was preceded by the Tilos Project which was part of the European research programme “HORIZON 2020” and through a consortium led by Eunice Energy Group, a hybrid station was installed on the island, which is an original and innovative application, which even won the prize in the category “Energy Islands”, which was decided by a committee of experts, as well as the Public Award after an open vote among a total of 12 European projects.

Recently, Environment and Energy Minister Kostas Skrekas referred to a budget of almost 1 billion euros which will promote investment projects for the green transition of the islands. This way, the quality of life of citizens will be upgraded and the Greek islands will become an even more attractive tourist destination.

(At the same time, the Funds of the Fair Transition Mechanism may operate as an accelerator for the decarbonization of the islands, which is a bet for the days ahead. The Island Territory Plan is currently being drafted by the Fair Transition Development Plan Committee and once approved by the European Commission, it will “unlock” funds not only from the Fair Transition Mechanism, but mainly from the Regional and Sectoral Operational Programmes of the National Strategic Reference Framework (ESPA) 2021-2027.)

Greece, our islands can now support new investment funds that will be directed both to strategic investments and to the capital market.

The renewable energy sector is one of the main sectors of Greek economy, where the bet of growth and especially sustainable development will be based.

There is now experience, there is political will, there is a wide range of opportunities that stems not only from the inexhaustible love for our islands and our desire to support the economy but also from the benefits that interested investors can reap, in Greece of tomorrow.

Greece's competitiveness in the field of employment has improved and I state my optimism about Greece's growth prospects as I stand here before you, because conditions are now ripe to favour both large and smaller investments.

There is a wide range of projects such as regional ports, airports, water ways, energy projects, the development of alternative forms of tourism in the post-covid period where a new field of action is de facto formed and we should be ready.

The energy sector with the electrical interconnections of the Greek islands and energy storage investments, the sector of 5G infrastructure and fiber optics, digital transformation, Public-Private Sector Partnership programmes and of course the adoption of successful proposals from abroad that can find application in our islands, which each individually and in their entirety can unfold a fan of opportunities for successful investments that will shape the future not only of the Dodecanese but also of our country.

And, of course, the shift to “green tourism” is now also a dominant trend in the investment sector. We need to create new products, with an emphasis on creating experiences, investing in quality service provision, getting away from building new units that will come to be added to existing ones without offering anything different.

Green tourism with an ecological character and environmentally friendly practices is what we must shape in today's environment for tomorrow, by escaping the stifling context of economic competition.

Therefore, in the post-Covid era, which we are all talking about today, we are given the opportunity to change the productive model by mobilising the resources of the recovery fund that will be available for our region.

In our opinion, bearing in mind the problems of climate change and sustainable development issues, investments related to clean energy, water availability, waste recycling, forest management and development should be strengthened.

Alternative tourist investments should also be strengthened which lengthen the tourist season and have great added value without stifling the infrastructure of the islands, such as:

- 1) Marine tourism
- 2) Agricultural tourism
- 3) Elderly tourism
- 4) Medical tourism

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

The relaunch of the Dodecanese Economy, which is the territorial competence of our Chamber, requires various interrelated actions over time.

It goes without saying that depending on the complexity of the local economies of the islands in the first phase, appropriate measures should be taken to keep the sustainable businesses in the region afloat.

The productive model of the region which characterizes all development programmes for private investment has two pillars:

Firstly, the high tourist consumption and

Secondly, the substitution of imports with local production to cover tourist consumption.

This model has been tested in practice and has failed because the cost of production on the islands is prohibitive.

To change the production model of the region due to the inherent difficulties, technology and innovation are needed especially in the food industry, livestock farming, folk art crafts, industry producing investment goods for the tourism industry as well as in the activity for the repair and maintenance of yachts.

Unfortunately, in our region, compared to other regions in Greece, there is no appropriate structure staffed with suitable personnel for the introduction and dissemination of new technology and innovations.

Especially for the large islands of Rhodes, Kos and Kalymnos it is necessary to draw up development programs and incentives which take into account the current situation, the international environment and good practices of other regions that have succeeded in this field.

The insularity of our region is characterised by inherent problems which require bold decisions to continue the development process in the new competitive environment.

The current government has demonstrated that it is proceeding to unblock the investments that had been bogged down for years and is prepared to support any new proposal for the benefit of our country and the investors who will choose it.

It is a fact that the climate in the investment sector has really changed and the number of strategic investors who during the crisis are looking for opportunities in our islands has increased.

As President of the Dodecanese Chamber, I pledge that as a body, we will assist by providing the greatest possible facilitation not only in consulting, but also in a procedural level at every stage of the investment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

I conclude my statement with the hope and the expectation that we will see each other soon and from another point of view. The doors of the Dodecanese Chamber are open and you are welcome to discuss, dream, plan and implement projects and actions on our islands, enjoying the uniqueness of Greek polynesia and the benefits of renowned Greek hospitality.

Thank you for your attention.