

*During the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Republic of China (Taiwan) created an economic miracle, and alongside Singapore, South Korea and Hong Kong, became known as one of the "Four Asian Tigers." Meanwhile, Taiwan transitioned from the authoritarian one-party rule to a full-fledged democracy. Taiwan follows a steady path and faces with grace and decency all the challenges and burdens that come up.*

*This political elegance led us to ask for a meeting with Taiwan's Representative, Ambassador Sherman S. Kuo at Taipei's Representative Office in Greece in order to speak with a person that plays an important role in his country's exceptional route in a world that is constantly changing, mostly not in a good way, by doing the exact opposite.*

*We did not have it wrong. The welcome was warm and the conversation we had with Mr. Kuo was explicable and open-minded beyond any expectation.*



**Ambassador Kuo , you are Taiwan's new Ambassador here in Greece. Congratulations and welcome.**

**Could you please tell us a few things about your role here?**

**Are you experiencing it the way you expected it to be, considering the fact that Greece, especially nowadays, is going through a lot of difficulties?**

Our office represents the interests and policies of the Taiwan government and our mission is to enhance Taiwan's relations with Greece. Our consular section is here to assist and protect our nationals traveling in Greece and issue visas to the Greek businessmen and students who wish to work, study and live in Taiwan. Other purposes of our presence include promoting bilateral trade, investment and tourism, and building mutual understanding through increasing parliamentary interaction and educational, cultural and youth exchanges.

I arrived in Athens in September 2016 to head the Taipei Representative Office in Greece. During the past few months, I have witnessed and experienced the complex challenges facing this remarkable country. I'm most impressed by the generosity of the average Greek people: despite the existing problems of their daily life and with only limited means, they continue to offer help to the elderly, the ill and the refugees.

#### **How do you see the external relations between Taiwan and Greece?**

There is no diplomatic relationship between the Hellenic Republic and the Republic of China (Taiwan). There is no Greek representative office or trade office in Taiwan. But Taiwan has maintained our presence here since 1973, I remain hopeful that our hard work here will lead to positive outcomes, and opportunities will rise for improved relations between Taiwan and Greece.

With a population of 23 million on an area of 36 thousand square kilometers, roughly one third of the size of Greece, Taiwan stands as the world's 22<sup>nd</sup> largest economy. It is the world's 17<sup>th</sup> largest exporter and the 18<sup>th</sup> largest importer. It is the world's 5<sup>th</sup> largest holder of foreign exchange reserves of 432 billion US dollars of March 2016. Our high-tech industries including semiconductor, optoelectronics, communications, all have maintained very high global market share. Our wafer production and IC packaging and testing are ranked No. 1 worldwide.

Greece is Taiwan's 61<sup>st</sup> largest trade partner, with an annual trade volume of 200-300 million Euros during the past few years. There is a lot of space for growth. We hope more and more Greek people and businesses get to know the high-performance enterprises in Taiwan and develop mutually-beneficial cooperation.

**Regarding to our information you are already trying to expand Taiwan's trade and tourism activities here in Greece. Part of it will be achieved by establishing a direct flight which will connect our two countries.**

**Please give us some details about it.**

With rich culture reflected by its 18 UNESCO World Heritage Sites and remarkable scenery of its Aegean islands, Greece is always a very attractive tour destination for people in Taiwan. We believe the people and the government of Greece both welcome more tourists from Taiwan.

Direct flights are always mutually beneficial for the promotion of tourism and trade opportunities. During the last few years, there were approximately 7000 Taiwanese tourists visiting Greece each year. I am sure that direct flights between the two countries will easily increase the number of tourists for both sides. Therefore, our office will continue to help facilitate communications between Taiwan's airlines and the civil aviation authority in Greece to make Taipei-Athens direct flights come true.

**You are representing Taiwan based in a country that is also member of the E.U. which seems to be in crisis also.**

**So, what is your opinion about the situation in European Union in general and how does this affect your country's relations with them?**

Taiwan and the EU are important economic partners. Taiwan was the EU's 18<sup>th</sup> largest trading partner in trade in goods and its seventh largest trading partner in Asia, after mainland China, Japan, South Korea, India, Hong Kong and Singapore in 2015. The EU is the fifth largest trading partner of Taiwan, behind mainland China, ASEAN, the USA and Japan. Trade between Taiwan and the EU-28 reached US\$ 46.4 billion in 2015.

The European Commission set up the Economic and Trade Office in Taipei in 2003; Since then, 16 member states have established 20 offices in Taiwan and greatly enhanced bilateral trade and people-to-people exchange. We hope in the near future, Greece can do the same.

In recent years, the European Parliament has made great efforts to deepen the economic and trade relations between Taiwan and the European Union, and in particular to adopt the "Taiwan-EU Economic and Trade Relations" resolution in 2013, clearly expressing its position of supporting the launch of Taiwan-EU bilateral investment agreement negotiations to the EU Council. The Trade and Investment Policy Paper, published by the European Commission in October 2015, states that it will explore launching investment negotiations with Taiwan.

The signing of a Taiwan-EU investment agreement will prove beneficial to economic and trade relations between Taiwan and EU member countries, including Greece. I would like to urge the Greek government to continue to offer its support in the matter.

**Last but not least, you are from a country which strongly believes in and supports the institution of Democracy and now you live in Greece, Democracy's birthplace.**

**Furthermore, your newly elected President, Tsai-Ing wen, is a woman. How do you see our countries' s similarities that despite the fact that they even belong to different continents seem to have a lot in common.**

**We would also like your opinion about your new female President.**

The first commonality between Greece and Taiwan that comes to my head is the value of Democracy. During the classical era of Ancient Greece, many city-states had forms of government similar to democracy, in which the free native adult male citizens took a direct part in the management of the affairs of the state. Greece is thus called the birthplace of Democracy.

Democratization processes in Taiwan proceeded over a prolonged period. With significant effort on the part of activists and the opposition movement dated back to the 1960s, the first organized opposition party, Democratic Progressive Party, was established in 1986, the struggle for democratization is punctuated by electoral milestones, and eventually the first transfer of power happened in 2000 when the ruling Kuomintang was defeated in the presidential election of that year. Last year marks the third transfer of power, DPP is now again the ruling party. Taiwanese people might support different political parties, but we all have a common core value – democracy. The 2017 report from the Freedom House, a major advocator on democracy, ranked Taiwan “most free” in both categories of political rights and civil liberties.

The biggest news about Taiwan in the year 2016 is that in January, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairwoman Tsai Ing-wen achieved a landslide victory in the presidential election and led her party to its first majority in the Legislature (parliament).

President Tsai has law degrees from National Taiwan University, Cornell University and London School of Economics and Political Science and served as vice premier from 2006 to 2007. She assumes the nation's highest office with a strong mandate to enact her progressive vision for the country on May 20, 2016.

She vows to deepen our relationships with friendly democracies, including Europe, to advance multifaceted cooperation and to support and participate in international cooperation on emerging global issues including humanitarian aid, medical assistance and anti-terrorism. Her goal is to make Taiwan an indispensable partner for the international community.

Taiwan would like to make more contributions to the international community on issues including climate change, humanitarian relief, counter-terrorism cooperation and joint fight against transnational crimes. We hope that our friends in Greece and in the European Union would continue to support Taiwan's participation in important international organizations such as International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) to give Taiwan an opportunity to contribute to the international community.

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