



**ELEFThERIA BERNIDAKI - ALDOUS**  
Member d' Etat – Nea Dimokratia

**SALUTATION**  
**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE ENAT NETWORK**  
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Mr. President, Mr. Ambrose,  
Dear friends,

I am happy to be with you today, at the first international conference of the European Network for Accessible Tourism.

It's true that many of the available tourism choices, in the European Union as well as in Greece are not accessible to tourists with disabilities. As a result, millions of people with disabilities don't enjoy the pleasures and emotions that tourism can offer.

It is estimated that over 40.000.000 Europeans with disabilities seek accessible tourism destinations every year that answer to their needs. Greece, being one of the most important European destinations, addresses the subject with special interest and it is a great honour for our country to host this international meeting.

Dear friends,

Unfortunately, those involved with tourism have misunderstood the concept of accessibility. They think that just a ramp in a hotel automatically makes it accessible. Yet, accessibility also means accessible public transportation means, accessible archeological sites and museums, accessible beaches. Accessibility dimensions are many and complex, something that the responsible institutions of the state often ignore, acting brokenly, without an overall approach to the problem.

Improving the accessibility in tourism infrastructure is not the sole terminus. The fundamental terminus is the reliable information of the tourist who is interested, information on the existing tourism venues, which are able to cover his/her particular needs and preferences. The aim of timely information is specific: the disabled person must have the opportunity to choose his/her preferred tourism destination, without the dream vacation ending up to be a nightmare.

As most of you know, a very important decision was taken last May by the European Union. According to an ECOFIN resolution on the Member-States receiving public funding from the structural Fund of the European Union in 2007-2013, the implementation of the principle of equal treatment is an indispensable condition. This opportunity is not to be missed. I deeply believe that the connection of the European funding to the principle of accessibility can also rigidly affect the improvement in the

accessibility of tourism infrastructure. Among other things, it can also multiply the tourism choices of people with disabilities.

We must not forget that in August [2006], after 4 years of consultation, the international Convention of People with Disabilities was signed by UN. It is a very important convention, highlighting that disability is a matter of human rights, ones that should also be respected in tourism.

Friends,

In Greece, with the Presidential Decree 43/2002 on the classification of hotels in categories of stars and their technical specifications, obligatory specifications for the accessibility of people with disabilities are included. Yet, despite the legal background, the cases of accommodations claiming to be accessible when they really aren't are not few.

This is why I think it is absolutely necessary that the state checks and certifies the technical and essential accessibility specifications in all tourism infrastructures.

Despite the lack of accessible infrastructure and the existing difficulties, allow me to be optimistic. For the first time in Greece, tourism development is dealt with seriously by the government of Kostas Karamanlis. With the opportunity of organizing the Olympic and Paralympic Games the accessibility in tourism venues and public transportation means has improved significantly. Special departments dealing with the accessibility of the disabled people have been launched in many Ministries, e.g. the Ministries of Culture, Transportation, Internal Affairs, Foreign Affairs, to mention only those directly involved with tourism. The participation of the Greek Ministry of Tourism in the ENAT network proves the intense interest of the State for the improvement of the accessibility of tourism infrastructure in our country. It proves that Greece finally moves on rapidly towards the right direction.

Dear friends,

A good start and important progress have already been made, but no doubt a lot has to be done. For the constant improvement of the quality of life of citizens with disabilities and their participation in the joy of life a lot of work, patience and mostly co-operation of all institutions involved, from all European countries is still needed. The state, but mostly tourism companies must comprehend that tourists with disabilities also have the right to be hosted in tourism destinations, without discriminations and exclusions. Tourism is a social right for all.

To conclude, let me congratulate the organizers for the excellent organization of today's event. I want you to know I will always be by your side, in the joint effort for the improvement of the quality of life of people with disabilities. I want to welcome all of you to this very useful meeting, especially our guests from abroad.

I wish the works of the conference are most successful and I am certain it will bear useful and interesting conclusions for the future.

Thank you.