

Eugenia Chandris - BHCC British President speech

Good morning.

Your Excellency, Mr. Minister, distinguished speakers, dear guests.

On behalf of my Greek co president of the British Hellenic Chamber of Commerce, Harris Oikonomopoulos and the Board of Directors, it is my pleasure to welcome you and to thank you for your interest and your presence here today.

This timely event is an indication of the Chamber's institutional approach to the crucial issue of Brexit and of its role as a catalyst for studies, debates and proposals in addition to being an amplifier of the voice of your business interests aimed at Greek, UK and EU negotiators and decision and policy makers.

Firstly I would like to thank our corporate sponsors: Watson Farley & Williams, PWC, KPMG, Oikonomopoulos & Partners and Chandris Hotels.

Secondly I want to address a special thank you to EUROBANK for hosting this event, the first of a number of initiatives that the Chamber is taking in order to study, propose and lobby the Greek, UK and EU administrations for its members and the Greek and UK business community's interests.

Many thanks also to INTEREL for being this event's Knowledge Partner. UK Managing Partner George McGregor from London and EU Deputy Managing Partner Kieran O' Keefe from Brussels have made a special trip to Athens for this gathering. They are joining us today to convey to us the pulse of the UK and EU establishments in reaction to UK Prime Minister Teresa May's letter of the 30th of March that triggered the "Article 50" process for the United Kingdom exiting – or exciting as some incorrectly but amusingly put it - the European Union.

INTEREL, a major international public affairs organization is available to discuss with you any issues that may be of interest to your business, either directly or through their Greek representative and Chamber member ROLLERDECK ASSOCIATES, headed by Mr. Yannis Kofinis and his partner Mr. Yannis Enepekides.

Special thanks also to the Chamber's other partners in this event: The Panhellenic Exporters Association, the Athens Chamber of Tradesmen, the Hellenic Banks Association, the Institute of Economic and Industrial Research, the European Public Law Organization, the British Council, and the Hellenic Alumni Association of the London School of Economics.

Many thanks also to the Executive Vice President of the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises and former Greek Ambassador to London Mr. Konstantinos Bitsios, and to the Commercial Director of the UK Embassy in Athens Mr. Sotiris Leontaris, for supporting the event.

Also Huffington Post Greece's digital coverage is much appreciated.

Whether you ever were, or are now, a devout supporter of a united Europe, you cannot ignore how that formidable edifice is showing signs of disintegration. The European Union, once an integral part of our lives that we took for granted, is crumbling and it will change life as we know it. Britain, millennia after its geological split from the Continent, is separating from it with repercussions we shall examine today.

I am a British citizen as much as I am a Greek one, and I feel a cultural and ethnic bond to both countries. There are huge challenges that must be addressed and questions answered.

As you will see, the Chamber has put together a tight schedule and we shall be spanning the subjects you can see listed in the program.

Before giving the floor to our host, Mr. Nikolaos Karamouzis, Chairman of Eurobank's Board of Directors and Chairman of the Hellenic Bank Association board of directors, allow me to put forward some numbers that put the discussion that will follow in a rather interesting perspective:

1. About 68.000 Greeks obtained a National Insurance Number in the UK between 2010 and 2016.
2. Greek citizens living and working in the UK are estimated by the Greek Embassy in London to be between 120.000-150.000 (though no official registration procedure is available)

3. British citizens living and working in Greece are estimated at between 35.000 - 40.000.
4. Around 13.000 Greek students are registered and study in UK universities per year, where about 1.500 Greeks are teaching.
5. UK based companies foreign direct investment in Greece is circa €5BN.
6. An increasing number of Greek businesses, attracted by a most dynamic UK market have established branch offices or operate in or through the UK.
7. Greek exports to the UK amounted to 1 billion euros in 2016 with UK imports to Greece amounting to 1.2 billion euros.

8. TOURISM INDUSTRY

The UK market is the third biggest tourism market for Greece. There were approximately 2.4 million UK visitors to Greece in 2014 and 3 million in 2015 and 3.3 in 2016. However there was a 21% drop in UK tourists' expenditures per trip out of the UK and the sharp drop of the pound against the Euro influenced this.

We have many interesting issues to cover so once again thank you for joining us and I would just like politely to remind speakers to adhere to their time limits.

And now I would like to welcome Mr. Nicholas Karamouzis to the podium.