



Message by SI President George A. Papandreou to the SI Presidium  
New York, 23 September 2011

Dear friends, dear comrades,

Like every year, I was planning to be with you in New York today, to chair our Presidium meeting. Urgent developments in Greece and on-going negotiations unfortunately obliged me to remain in Athens.

This is the fourth consecutive year that our Presidium meets during the UN General Assembly in New York. It is important that we have made this annual meeting an institution - a great opportunity for us to exchange views on crucial global issues, at the right time, in the right place.

Once again, a key issue on our agenda will be the global financial crisis and its implications. Since the outset of the crisis, our organisation has generated a number of concrete ideas and specific initiatives that could have helped to contain the crisis. Unfortunately, both the international community and the European Union have been too slow and too fragmented in their response. Today, the global financial situation is increasingly precarious and the crisis is far from over. It is threatening the banking sector, the stability of developed economies, and undermining global efforts to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals.

As you know, Greece is in the eye of the storm. My government and the Greek people face enormous challenges. In this extremely difficult economic environment, we are pursuing a very tough austerity programme, as well pushing through unprecedented reforms. In response to those who doubt our efforts, we are proud to underline that in 2010 we achieved the biggest deficit reduction within the Eurozone, a 5% reduction from 36 billion euros to 24 billion euros. Primary state expenses were reduced 10 billion euros.

However, we still have a long way to go. Not only as far as fiscal consolidation is concerned, but also in terms of the structural reforms that will make our country competitive again, and allow us to achieve growth, sustainable debt, and create jobs.

Solving the Greek debt crisis will not address the broader implications and underlying causes of the economic crisis in Europe. Greece represents just 3 per cent of the Eurozone's public debt and only 2.5 per cent of the Eurozone's GDP. There is an urgent need for strategic decisions that will shield EU member-states from future crises of this kind. This calls for fundamental reforms of our institutions, moving towards closer fiscal, economic and political union. We need permanent stabilisation mechanisms and new financial instruments that promote solidarity and social justice.

In this context, more and more decision makers are becoming convinced that we can create sustainable and more equitable growth through innovative tools like Eurobonds or a financial transaction tax. This is largely due to the active campaigning of members of our political family.

The Financial Transaction Tax is on the agenda of the upcoming G20 meeting. Let us hope that there will be some progress in this debate. Undoubtedly, there can be no efficient way of addressing the financial crisis without more radical changes to the global financial architecture and a more active involvement of all major international stakeholders. Until now, the G20 has not been able to generate the necessary consensus to take concrete steps in this direction.

Time is also running out concerning climate change. We must act now to protect future generations. A lot remains to be done before the next COP 17 in Durban, South Africa. Among the unresolved issues is an agreement on an extension of the Kyoto protocol and new institutions such as Technology Mechanisms and the Green Climate Fund. The Socialist International's Commission for a Sustainable World Society is following progress on these issues closely and will soon present a new set of priorities.

In recent years, the Socialist International has played a positive, proactive role in elections, conflict zones, and global summits promoting democracy, peace, fairness, and equal opportunities. The Socialist International has set an example of collective action by a group of political parties with varied histories, backgrounds, contexts and sizes. Our diversity is one of our most important assets. Even, if sometimes, it makes our working methods more complicated.

Conservatives understand very well the value of our International. That's why they feel uncomfortable with our achievements. In the coming months, we will continue our efforts to humanise globalisation and promote our shared values. We will stand by our members in every continent and I am confident that we can make a difference during these challenging times.