Speech by His Excellency Mr. C. PAPAYANNIS (GREECE) delivered in plenary session on 18 September 1953

Mr. Chairman may I say how honoured and gratified I am to take part, at your suggestion, in the work at the Session of the Contracting Parties.

The wide scope of the objectives pursued by the General Agreement and the achievements already attained, despite difficulties and divergencies, were not unknown to me; I had already followed closely and with keen interest a series of reports which had been submitted to me, and recently I had to deal with a number of questions concerning my country which led me in the discharge of my functions to study the complex machinery which, through your efforts and the tenacious determination of so many pioneer countries, has set up a statute for genuine collaboration in the sphere of international trade. I must admit, however, that the impressions and experience I am acquiring in taking part personally in your activities are throwing a much clearer and more beneficial light on what had remained at a distance somewhat abstract, theoretical and undefined. I am therefore glad to have decided to come here.

I have only one regret, and that is that my urgent duties as a member of the Greek Government, will not permit me to follow the work of the Session to the close. I shall therefore take this opportunity of stating before you in all frankness certain points which concern Greece, giving their general outline, while leaving the final task to the unfailing objective and conciliatory judgment of the Contracting Parties under your Chairmanship; our delegation will always be prepared to supply any information and clarification you may consider desirable.

It is with great satisfaction that I am able to announce to you today that the two questions which were the subject of reproofs and accusation against Greece and which caused so much discussion during the Seventh Session, have been solved in the intermediate period, and that the solution, which is certainly calculated to satisfy them, has already been communicated to the Contracting Parties. The explanations supplied at the time by the Greek delegation have been justified and the undertakings given have been complied with by my Government. These concern, notably, the special taxes which were abolished on 9 April, immediately following devaluation of our national currency, which supplies the best proof that the nature of the measure taken was solely monetary; there was also the question of pre-war coefficients which had been provisionally increased despite binding, and which were reduced to their contractual level on 17 July; our Government recognized that although the measure was a case of force majeure, it was none the less an infringement of the General Agreement, and they did not hesitate to reduce these coefficients to their former level.
I should also like to inform you that Greece, after fifteen years of application of a system of ever increasingly strict controls and prohibitions, took the courageous and, I might even say, heroic decision, in full cognizance of the dangers entailed, completely to liberalise her imports. I cannot gainsay the paramount importance of such a measure by a small country which is far from prosperous, whereas powers, far more privileged by fortune, continue to maintain and even to tighten their restrictions. May I say that on this point Greece stresses that the example she is giving should be assessed at its full value by all the contracting parties.

I now come to the unpleasant part of my statement which my Government has already communicated to the members of the GATT in its declaration distributed under L/117.

The general liberalization which we have adopted and which we have just applied, we should wish to consider a lasting measure; we shall feel uneasy and would consider it a step backwards if we were compelled sooner or later to revert to the controls we have always found irksome.

I must inform you that all successive Governments in Greece which have followed one another after the negotiations of Annecy and Torquay and the ratification of their conclusions, and public opinion in our country, have considered the concessions made by Greece, covering three quarters of their tariff positions, to be disproportionately cumbersome and ill-compensated. This unpleasant atmosphere existed already, apart from any idea of liberalization of trade, over a period when the existing controls nullified nearly all the advantages of import duties. The governments were under very strong pressure to disengage Greece from undertakings which were considered intolerable. The post-war years were years of reconstruction and industrialization.

Several articles which were not produced in Greece at the time of the Annecy Conference are now produced there. There are cases when present protection does not exceed 2 per cent or 1 per cent, and all the readjustments provided for under Article II, paragraph 6 of the Agreement, as a consequence of the devaluation of the drachma, do not succeed in increasing it beyond 4 per cent or 2 per cent, on account of existing binding obligations.

The Greek Government are therefore constrained, for this reason, to ask for the sympathetic consideration of the Contracting Parties, on this point. Our delegation will submit for your assessment a very limited schedule containing a small number of articles for which bound tariffs should be revised or increased, without exceeding the reasonable limits, similar to the tariffs applied by the other contracting parties. We are prepared to enter into consultations with those of the contracting parties who might consider themselves injured by the measures we propose and to supply all the data in support of what we consider elementary justice, but at the same time we would ask that any provision of the Agreement - Article XVIII or Article XIX which could remedy our position - be interpreted in our favour, failing which participation of Greece in the Agreement may become problematical.

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I wish to repeat that the number of positions is very limited and the increase we should wish to see adopted would in no case exceed the strictly necessary level to ensure subsistence of certain new industries in the country - a devastated country, occupied by the enemy, and which is now endeavouring to achieve recovery. I must stress at the same time that it is a country which is courageous enough to liberalize her trade and thus to render the best service in implementing the General Agreement.

My statement will end here, Mr. Chairman.

The agenda contains several questions of paramount importance; some of them concern and deeply affect my country; as an example, I would give Agenda item 3 on Article XXVIII, item 6 on Japan, items 22 and 23 concerning our complaint in regard to duty on dried figs and subsidy on sultanas (cases which still remain in abeyance, I regret to say) items 24 and 25 which add further obstacles to the exports of products which concern us, and especially item 1, sub-paragraph 4, on the application of Article I, which might possibly affect certain of our products exported by Greece to the United Kingdom.

My delegation intend to examine all these questions in a spirit of understanding, and will show our keen desire to overcome all difficulties and to discover solutions which will be most profitable to international solidarity. We feel sure that, in turn, we too shall meet with that same understanding.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.