



Bureau of Political Communication
and International Affairs

Address to the Hellenic Observatory
of the London School of Economics

By the Mayor of Athens
Dora Bakoyannis

“What makes an Olympic City:
The Case of Athens”

November 4, 2004

Your Grace, Your Excellency, the Greek Ambassador,

Sir Howard,

Dear Professors and students of the London School of Economics,

(Interruption by anti-Olympics protesters)

So let me welcome everybody who is here – even the people who disagree with the Olympic Games. We in Greece are very proud to have invented democracy, so we clearly understand that you have a right to protest.

So let me continue.

I would like to welcome the Greek students who I see in front of me, and the many Chinese students. I really understand that there is a great interest that many in China have in the Olympic Games and I would like to wish Beijing every success.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Almost a year ago, I made a commitment to the Hellenic Observatory of the London School of Economics, and to Professor Kevin Featherstone, that I would visit London and participate in a discussion at the Hellenic Observatory with its distinguished academics and their guests. I am particularly pleased that Sir Howard is present and chairing this event.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I don't need to elaborate on the reasons why it was impossible for me to visit earlier in the year. Athens, as you all know, was frantically racing to fulfill its obligations to the world and to stage what were acclaimed as wonderful Olympic Games.

Dear friends,

As the Greeks say, all negatives have their positive side. And this delay in fulfilling my commitment to the LSE and the Hellenic Observatory, now offers me the advantage of speaking from a position of experience rather than expectation. The question posed, by Londoners in particular, as they bid for the 2012 Olympic Games, is what makes an Olympic City.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

It is obvious that I am not in a position to provide answers to this question at an international level. That would require a detailed study of all cities that have undertaken to organise Olympic Games in the last 108 years; Their reasons for bidding, their expectations from the Games, and their overall performance as Olympic Cities.

As we all know, there have been successes of various kinds, at the organisational level, as well as a few failures.

Yet, what has been widely contested is the overall economic effect of the Games for the various cities that held them.

At the organisational level, there have been, as I said, successes of different kinds. For example, in 1896 Athens managed to revive the Games and give them enough impetus to continue to this day.

In 1936, Berlin set the example – in my opinion very unfortunate - of Games conducted in a lavish and spectacular manner.

In 1952, Helsinki conducted smooth, efficient Games of an almost purely athletic nature.

Unlike Helsinki, Moscow and Los Angeles in the '80s were the most heavily politicised Games of them all.

Sydney managed to balance spectacle with organisation and keep politics out of the picture.

There have, of course, been relative failures too. Such were the Games of 1900 and of 1904, which necessitated the intervention of Athens in 1906, to put back the Olympics on track.

Nevertheless, these spectacular and important Games, the “Interim Olympiad”, as they came to be called, were never accepted as a proper Olympiad. In the post-war years we have seen the issues of the cost and long-term effects of an Olympiad for host cities assuming ever-greater importance.

Evaluations of this sort have been easier to make than at the purely athletic level. I will cite just two examples: Montreal and Barcelona.

Montreal never managed to recoup the cost of hosting the Games and, despite apparent improvements to the city, it is considered no match to the overall success of Barcelona.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I said earlier, it is difficult to define what makes an Olympic City, and definitions should really be left to the experts.

Common sense seems to indicate, however, that a city’s ambition to stage Olympic Games is determined by two main criteria: firstly, faith in its ability to host them, and second, its interest in utilizing the Games to raise the international profile of the city and country.

The United States is the sole city-only case. It is one of those countries that Oscar Wilde defined as being so big that it need only be referred to by its initials. In the United States it is a matter of Georgia or California, Atlanta or Los Angeles, not so much the US as a whole.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Athens, as a city and as the capital of Greece, is both a typical and atypical case. It is typical in that the 2004 Olympics reflected a growing confidence in its capacity to face challenges, and its perception of itself as a major regional metropolis.

It is also typical as far as the second criterion is concerned: Athens, naturally, desires to boost its image internationally.

Political ambition exists too. Greece has entered the 21st century as a leading economic and political power in South-Eastern Europe. The Games obviously demonstrate just that.

But Athens, and Greece, are atypical, in a number of ways. First of all, the Greek economy, even though twice the size of that of six other Balkan countries combined, is – along with Portugal – among the weakest in the European Union, and it faces a serious public debt problem.

For several decades now, only affluent countries have hosted the Games. The Greek state, to put it mildly, is not known for its organization. And, finally, Greece, with a population of some 11 million people, is certainly not a big country. These were all exceptional situations for a modern Olympics.

But a second set of atypical criteria, peculiarly Greek this time, managed to tip the balance on the positive side and overcome the difficulties.

This second set of criteria is unique in that they comprise historical, social and psychological factors. Such factors include the profound Greek belief in the Greekness of the Games; the desire of the Greeks to disprove the stereotypes about them; and the ambition of Athens to demonstrate to the world that it is a modern, vibrant, forward-looking city.

Athens and Greece, long viewed by many as chaotic and disorganised, have proven just the opposite.

Believe me, I had a very difficult time this past June when I visited London. I don't believe that anybody who attended the press conference here believed me when I said "Athens will be ready". They left the press conference and said "The mayor believes Athens will be ready".

But Athens met the challenge of the Olympic Games in a most remarkable manner. We managed to eliminate the stereotypes and the belief that only the rich and mighty can undertake such a great endeavour.

The Games achieved something even more remarkable, though - to change Greeks' perception of themselves!

All in all, the Athens Olympics were an extraordinary achievement on all counts and, more importantly, they managed to restore the faith of many smaller nations in the Olympic Ideals.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

After the Games, a different set of questions arises. The achievement is unquestioned but what about the long-term economic effects of the Olympics?

What about the sustainability of Athens' urban improvements?

What about the future of the venues and the overall effect of the Games on the city's economy and, particularly, its tourism industry?

At this stage, it is too early to answer such questions.

But there are several factors, both positive and negative, that give us some indication of what we can expect.

First of all, Athens has been transformed.

Its public transport system has been upgraded and now includes two new Metro lines, a rail link to the airport, a modernization of the old railway line, a new suburban rail and a new tramway along the southern Athens coast.

Athens has a state-of-the-art airport, new motorways which have helped decongest the city and magnificent venues that should attract major sporting events in future.

Our hotels – ranging from five-star to two-star - have been radically improved, and new ones have been built.

The city's historic centre has been redeveloped, with the creation of pedestrian walkways and a unique promenade linking Athens' archaeological sites.

Furthermore, we have a magnificent concert hall and a number of new as well as fully renovated museums.

The city itself has changed dramatically through an unprecedented infrastructure investment programme. Streets, pedestrian walkways and public spaces along 450 major roads covering 750 square kilometers have been renovated with special attention given to improving accessibility for people with disabilities. More than 1,500 building facades – many of them neoclassical - have been repainted. Some 350,000 plants and flowers and 8,200 trees were planted citywide.

One of the greatest advantages Greece gained as a result of the Games is human capital – with a great, big smile.

Finally, one must consider Greece's role as a major investor in the Balkan region and its powerful merchant marine. All of these elements point to a positive long-term effect of the Olympic Games for Athens, and for Greece.

The picture, of course, is not entirely rosy if one looks at the state of the Greek economy; its mounting public debt, labour market rigidities and rampant bureaucracy. The enlarged EU has obligations to its new members.

These factors indicate that Greece has a long way to go before it can translate its Olympic success into permanent, long-term benefits.

I am happy to say that the Greek government is in the process of introducing new bills in order to tackle many of these issues.

Planning is underway for the management and use of Olympic venues. Some may remain sport complexes while others will be used for different purposes.

If Greece is to further develop as a tourist destination and investment centre, it cannot rely simply on its newly-acquired infrastructure and natural attractions.

The Greek government must actively generate international interest through concrete policies and pioneering initiatives.

Dear friends,

I have pointed out some of the characteristics that define an Olympic City.

I have noted the aspirations and ambitions Athens shares with other Olympic Cities.

I have explained how Athens' case is unique, and briefly cited the positive and negative aspects of hosting the Games.

The final result remains an open question. But the Athens Olympics themselves were an open question too.

And throughout those anxious months leading up to the Games, whenever I was asked my opinion on the city's ability to host the Olympics, I always answered: "We are going to surprise the world." The Games turned out to be a tremendous success. And I am certain this is what we will continue to do.

Thank you.

Q & A SESSION

Q: Is there not a danger that after the recent success of the Athens Olympics that the new image might be short-lived and that the view of the world might just return to the previous chaotic and disorganized view that they always had of Greece before the Games?

MAYOR: Well, that's a challenge. We started having to prove to the world that we had radically changed. That Athens has changed and that Greece has changed. Nobody believed us in the beginning. We were late starters. Sometimes there was even a reason for people to be very critical of us. But we made it. I think we really changed. But the Greeks loved it. Even my Athenians loved it, though they were not very sure at the beginning.

Athens is a changed city because the people wanted it to change. The people participated. The Athenians participated in every effort. So yes, we still have traffic problems. We'll deal with them as good as any old and ancient city can, but I believe that we will not go back to the chaotic image which we had. And we will not let the people down, who will probably come in masses next year, to make sure what they saw on television is also reality. I hope that it will work.

Q: What advice would you give to a mayor in terms of how much direct control its appropriate for the mayor to take in the lead up to the Olympics? Were you directly in control? What kind of structure did you establish of control? It must have been a very nervous time in the months leading up to [the Games].

MAYOR: Very nervous! And it was very difficult because we had two years. Two years for the City of Athens. Seven years for the Olympics, but two years for the city. Practically, the Olympic preparations started in the City of Athens about one-and-a-half years before the Games. It was very difficult. I had total control of the city, not of the organization of the Games. That was the organizing committee, which was responsible for the Games.

But for us, the biggest challenge we faced in Athens was that this city was the first city, after September 11, to organize Olympic Games. That had two very bad results. Firstly, the very high cost of security. We paid \$1.5 billion in Greek taxpayers' money. I want to make that clear because sometimes people think that the IOC participated in that. They didn't. It was just Greek money.

We didn't count on paying so much money, of course, because when we asked for the Games, September 11 had not happened. So we thought that we would have a security budget approximately as big as the security budget in Sydney. That was the first.

The second is that, ok, we had a wonderful security system. It worked, it meant high technological equipment, it meant cameras around the city. It was expensive, efficient, but it could have a result exactly contrary to what we really wanted because we wanted the city partying during the Games. We wanted a happy city. We wanted a city with a festive atmosphere. We wanted a city which would send around the world a message of peace, participation, solidarity.

And our challenge was to keep a balance between the atmosphere of the city with the message, and on the other side, the security. That was the reason why Athens decided to have 650 cultural events over 15 days, throughout the whole city. We did not hold any very big events so that crowd management would be safe. But we had the whole city partying. And it worked. It worked very well. We didn't have any problems. It was incredible that small thieves, pickpockets etc. disappeared. I think it was the solidarity of the Greek pockets but it worked and people left Athens and they were very happy.

Q: I have been observing that in the last 20 years, all those cities that were hosting the Olympic Games, they are trying to compete with one other and coming out with the most creative and innovative ideas about the stadiums and the construction. Athens did a great job. The ceremony and the stadium were spectacular, but don't you think that this puts pressure on the city in the future to come out with trying to be more innovative, with more expensive stadiums? What do you think?

MAYOR: You are asking the mayor and mayors think only about their cities and much less about the stadiums which are around the city. In Greece, we had the stadium already. We paid a lot for the roof of the stadium, the Calatrava roof. It was expensive but in my opinion it was a good idea because it left an architectural brand on the stadium and the Games.

But our money, the money of the city, was spent only in Athens. From the building facades to the pedestrian areas, the upgrading of neighborhoods etc. In my opinion this was money well spent. As in Beijing, they will start redeveloping whole neighborhoods and if they do, also showing old Putong etc – which I believe the mayor will– it will be a great idea for Beijing also.

Q: I was there [Athens] and I enjoyed it tremendously. It was the cultural aspect that I really enjoyed. I want to ask you what plans do you have, as the mayor of Athens, for promoting the culture that will attract many more people to Athens and even – why not – the return of the Parthenon Marbles?

MAYOR: What we will do, because it was such a tremendous success, is continue the way we did during the Olympic Games for next summer – the summer of 2005. It was a big success - people liked it. There are a lot of people around the world also who are interested in coming to Athens. Maybe it will not be as big because it's very expensive, but we will continue in his way.

The Parthenon Marbles is a different story but I still would like to give my opinion. We Greeks are fully aware that the Acropolis and the Parthenon do not belong to Greece. They are a world heritage, a cultural world heritage.

In China they told me that when students open their textbooks in the first year of architecture, you see the Acropolis in there. And I believe that this Acropolis should not be shown to the world mutilated. I was the minister of culture and it took me years to understand what the Parthenon Marbles really are and I fully understood it only when I saw a computer-generated model of what you see in the British Museum and what was in Athens. And when I saw that, I was able to understand what the Parthenon Marbles are. Well it's a pity that, today, 75 percent of the British people want the Marbles to be returned to Athens and that the British Museum still does not agree. We do not propose ownership of the Marbles – we don't want to have legal problems and then go to court. We propose a joint exposition of the Parthenon Marbles in Athens from the Acropolis and the British Museum. And we also propose giving the British Museum Greek artefacts so that they can put them on display...

I'm originally from Turkey, but grew up in London...

(laughter)

MAYOR: Don't laugh! We love our neighbours.

Q: You made a very good point before that you were not just involved in the Olympics, but you are involved in Athens overall. Do

you believe that you could spent the money – as mayor - any other way that would benefit Athens more than it did?

MAYOR.: My money? No. Because I was very careful in how Athenians' money was spent, so everything we did was permanent and had a long-term effect in all Athens neighborhoods. It was not only for the centre.

But honestly, at the state level, there is a lot of money spent which I fully understand the argument that it might be better spent in other ways. So if you have to balance out the idea of the Olympic Games - do you want it or not? You must really be sure that the long-term effect will be good enough to balance out this kind of money, which is money spent for just 15 days. So that's a decision politicians and society has to make. It is not an easy decision today. It's very expensive, it poses a lot of problems, it's a great decision. So you have to be very careful with it.

Q: What kind of impact do you suppose that Olympic Games brings to Greek people, socially and ecologically?

MAYOR: Sociologically, I told you a little bit before when I started speaking, there was a very big impact in Greece, starting with our self-confidence. We Greeks have a very good sport. We always like to speak badly about ourselves. When you find five Greeks together, they will probably start shouting about Greece. They love it.

That's why before the Games there were a lot of people who said "what are we going to do?", "people think badly about us", "we will never be ready", "we will never make it". There was also a lot in the press.

But after that, when they saw the result and when they took part in the effort, this was very important. In Greece we believed that we didn't have a tradition of volunteerism, and we didn't. It's a very Anglo-Saxon tradition.

Our volunteerism was always a family volunteerism. Families come in, they save everybody but on a very small, family level, not on a social level. And we managed to have great volunteers. We had great numbers and a great quality in our volunteers.

Even the City of Athens formed a team of volunteers, which no other Olympic City had done. We had 3,500 people speaking many languages, wearing yellow T-shirts which read "May I Help You?". They were in the sun for eight hours trying to help everyone who came to Athens. And the important thing was that our new settlers took part in this programme. So we had Syrians, Nigerians, Chinese and many other nationalities who

were volunteers for the City of Athens. So, that was very important for the self-esteem of the city.

Greece has a long way to go in terms of achieving results in the protection of the environment. I am certainly not proud of what this country has done in this field. The good thing about the Olympics is that the people started to understand what recycling means (*laughter*). But I told you we have a long way to go and I, as mayor, am fighting very hard on that issue. Sometimes very much alone.

Member of the audience: **Beijing has a longer way to go...**

MAYOR: I'm not sure. We started at zero. In practical terms, we are starting now and for a European country that is unacceptable.

Q: Just to add to the words of Mrs Bakoyannis, I was a volunteer for the City of Athens. I wore the yellow T-shirt and I hosted - as Mrs Bakoyannis said - all of these guests. There was one question that everyone asked us when I was part of this program. Are you thinking about continuing this programme? It was such a success, we had so much fun doing it and I was really wondering about that.

MAYOR: We are continuing with the programme. You know, sometimes it's worth setting high targets. At the beginning everybody told us that it would not be possible in Athens, but it was possible in Athens and now we are continuing with very concrete neighborhood volunteer programmes in different areas and with different people. And the interest is there. They were warmed up by the Games. They take part in other programmes the city has organised and I hope that this will continue in the future.

Q: Welcome on behalf of everyone here from China. I'm from Beijing, which will be the next host city. Unfortunately, we saw on the TV screen that although people did a lot, as you mentioned, there were a lot of vacant seats in the stadiums. Do you think it might be a good idea to cut down on the price so that we can make the tickets more available to common people, even if we [China] were not a small country like Greece?

MAYOR: Unfortunately, for Athens it was not possible because the tickets were sold. So at the beginning, Greece faced a problem because,

as you know, the Olympic Games work a lot with sponsors. Sponsors, including major firms like Coca-Cola etc, buy tickets. They bring people from around the world when they are sponsors to the Games. So what happened in Athens was that the ticket sales were very good, the money came in, the sponsors had bought the tickets but they didn't bring the people. And they didn't bring the people because the atmosphere was very bad.

A lot of people were really frightened and didn't come. So we faced a very difficult month – in terms of tourism - during the Games. We had empty seats, which were sold so we could not re-sell them, but also empty rooms in the hotels.

It was very difficult to fight against this atmosphere because wherever you went you heard security problems with the Games, the Games will be attacked, they will be blown up, terrorist attacks. So, we had to prove first to the world that we were able to have secure Games. Then over the 15 days they came. The 15 days later were much better and, of course, September and October were great for tourism. But July and August, particularly the beginning of August, were two very difficult months for us. That was the reason why the stadiums were full. The Greeks went. They had the cheaper tickets. The expensive tickets had been bought by the sponsors.

Q: After the tremendous success of the Olympics in Athens, has there been thought or discussions for future Olympics to take place in their place of origin, Greece?

(clapping)

MAYOR: Serious discussion? No. There have been some very nice articles in some newspapers, mainly in the newspapers that made our lives difficult before the Games, in an apologetic tone and they proposed that.

But I don't think that the IOC seriously would consider one host country for the Games. And they believe that having different countries around the world host the Games and different cities, they promote the Olympic spirit and they also gain money. They give other cities the opportunity to develop as they prepare for the Games. So I don't think that today there is any serious discussion on that.

Q: Regarding the cultural heritage in Athens as mentioned in previous questions, my parents say that Beijing is reconstructing part

of the last part of the city, including moving some historical buildings and sites that have historical value in the sense of cultural heritage. We know that Athens and Beijing are both cities that have existed for over 1,000 years, so did Athens encounter similar problems in its reconstruction?

MAYOR: You have a very concrete problem in Beijing, which is the problem I spoke about before, and that is the Putong area. What are you going to do with the Putong area? Because the rest you will also keep exactly as it was. So there is a big discussion and I also had a long discussion with your mayor about that.

How much do you keep in the Putong area so that it is of interest to tourists, and how much do you develop so that people are able to move in? I hope – I don't know, I'm going back [to Beijing] in February – the decision which is made, is a decision which will retain as much of Putong as possible, because it will be important for Beijing and it's important also for the history of the city and the country.

But no, in Athens we never faced these kind of problems, for the very simple reason that they are always solved by the archaeological committee, by the ministry of culture. You can never build anything in Athens if you don't have the permission of the ministry of culture and of the archaeologists. So that makes our life very difficult, very awful, but it's also the main reason why antiquities are still preserved.

Q: Looking slightly ahead, which city do you think should host the 2012 Games?

MAYOR: I am too seasoned a politician to answer that question.

Audience member: **It was worth a try...**

Q: The Games are for Athens or for Greece? Can only Athens benefit from the Games or the whole country?

MAYOR: Well, that's a small difference we have with China. We are a little bit smaller than China...

So that means that, practically, the Athens Games benefited the whole of Greece. Firstly, because we are smaller, as I said, and because we did something in Greece that had never happened before. It may be of interest to the UK or France. Some of the venues and events we spread around

Greece, which means that we had events in the Peloponnese, on Crete, in northern Greece etc.

That was good because people in certain regions of Greece were not very happy with the money which was spent in Athens, so their participation in the Games made them feel much better. But, of course, in big countries like yours, well there we are speaking about Beijing.

Like the Parthenon Marbles, I am a Greek living temporarily in England. In retrospect, do you think that if there were better planning four, five, six years ago, the money spent for the Olympic Games would have been a little bit less?

MAYOR: Yes! That's what I also said to the mayors who came and visited us in Athens, particularly the mayors bidding for the [2012] Games. If I could give advice, it would be quite simple. You need your seven years. We were late starters and we paid the price. It's very clear. You have to have organization which, from the first to the last day, is really there. Those were the two mistakes Greece made. It took us a long time and it cost us much more, so we have practically ourselves to blame for part of the cost and, of course, other reasons for the other part. The result? We need a very good LSE professor!

Q: I would like to persist a bit on the issue of the environmental consequences of the Olympics for Athens. You have already discussed whether it was positive or negative overall, but even if this question is open – are there any specific plans from the municipal authority or in coordination with the ministry of environment to capitalise on any positive effects that the Olympics have already had in the city: the new trams, trains... and to alleviate any detrimental effects that have occurred so far?

MAYOR: The infrastructure we built, honestly, we cannot say that it was only for the Olympic Games. It's infrastructure we needed anyway, but the expansion of the Metro, the tram line, the new transport system, is of course, environmentally very important.

Firstly, because we hope that by working all together we will encourage more and more Athenians to use public transport. We are working on that – though not making life for a car as difficult as it is in London but as close as we can get to that. So that is one goal and for the environment this is very important.

Another issue is that we were late with our tree-planting. Not in Athens. In Athens we planted more than we had planned to, but around Athens we were very late. Some of the venues had practically only decorative planting, which is absolutely of no use. This means that we have to work on that and do it properly if we really want to have good results. We need to undertake a lot of tree-planting in Greece.

Q: Given that there has been a very positive effect from the cultural events before, during and after the Games, do you think that there will be any long-term effects in the area of culture? In other areas apart from those concerning culture heritage?

MAYOR: Well, that was our second big challenge. Everybody knows that Athens has a lot of ancient culture and they visit us for that, so the city decided to follow a different policy and work with contemporary Greek artists.

So, in the beginning, when we installed a very big exhibition along the archaeological promenade, we had 85 modern Greek sculptures. So, the archaeological committee was shocked, some people were shocked, some people liked it.

The result was that the Athenians loved it and they went to it and liked it very much. So it was a success. We did the same thing with different kinds of art. I strongly believe that in Greece, there is a very big, artistic human capital. They didn't have the chance to show what they can create and for years they always remained in the shadow of our ancient culture. Well, that's okay but we have to work also on our contemporary art and that's the policy of the city.