Let’s weave a new silk road

For the poets and the philosophers, like Pindar, Aeschylus and Plato, the name Thrace has a symbolic meaning. It means the land of pure teaching and of holy poems. From the land of Dimokritou and Protagora (Avdira and Xanthis), it might be a good incentive to remember that the people of Thrace, just like all Greeks, are all caught by the “bug” of research, discovery and to innovation.

It is these values of the Greeks that we credit the promotion of our country abroad. In history, it has been evidenced that no matter how important a country’s geographical position is and regardless of whether the Gods shine over it... if its people are not “endowed” then all the riches will be lost.

Thrace is a meeting point of two continents. It is the crossroad for the East and the West, the beginning and the end of Europe. Historically, it has been evidenced that it is an important hub of civilisation, innovation and trade.

It is a land endowed with large tracts of fruitful farmland, ideal climate conditions and a bounty of natural wealth. From the ancient times, the people of Thrace have been busy working the land (wheat, cotton), raising silkworms, growing tobacco and breeding livestock, as well as exploiting the natural resources and making use of trade. Homer described the people of Thrace as those who traded wine during the Trojan war. Omar makes the “Ismarikos Wine” that is made in Ancient Maroneia known throughout the world. It is the same wine that Odysseus uses to get the infamous Cyclops drunk. About 2,500 years later, the Ismarikos Wine is still being produced by the people of Thrace.

Especially as regards growing wheat, the people of Thrace have proven themselves rather innovative. They developed “smart” farming tools so they could work smarter, not harder.

Special importance, not only practically but also symbolically, as regards how all Greeks should be working today, each in their own area of expertise, is the Thracian “palamaria” or “daktilithra”. This is a wooden contraption with a handle for one finger. One is worn on every finger and it is a tool that helps to work on the farm - picking fruits and vegetables.

Thrace, in ancient times, attracted the Athenians and the Ptolemaions. One example is the history of Arsinois who influenced the Dynasty of the Ptolemaion. The strength of the people of Thrace is not only estimated by trade and the products, but by the ideas, the innovation and discoveries. This is why Thrace attracted intellectuals and scholars who wanted to communicate and to embed the innovation and the “thirst” for the different and the creative, which was born in Thrace.

There were many very important moments in the history of Thrace during the Roman and Byzantine years. The Byzantine Emperor Ioustinianos, who was called Petros Savvaios (Ioustinou’s nephew) came from a farming family in a remote village in Thrace. Ioustinianos was the one who drafted the first legal code, eliminated the farmland leases and the system of buying and selling land by public officers. He also called on the wealthy to be on time when it came to paying their taxes.

Ioustinianos, who is known to this day as the “sleepless king” because of his strong work ethic, believed that the union of the empire requires the union of the church and so he made it a point of good governing of the Church.

He was the one who built the Agia Sofia Church and it was under his orders that some of the world’s most beautiful mosaics were created in the 6th Century A.D.

Ioustinianos is credited with the formation of the Byzantium Empire that is made up of Christianity, which played a strategic role in Byzantium (with Thrace at its core) and from the dowry of the Greeks. It was at this time that Thrace becomes the epicenter of the Byzantine Empire.

It developed at an unprecedented rate largely due to the improvement of the road network that connected at that time the big cities with the sea and the with central Europe. The biggest road was Egnatia Odos which started from Rome and reach Byzantium. The road connected Europe with Asia.

As early as the 9th Century B.C., the Greeks of Asia Minor knew all about silk though they thought it was a natural fiber. Alexander the Great tried to learn the secret of silk, but did not succeed, since he never reached China.

Nevertheless, it was of great importance - valued the same as a precious gem or gold. We know that all emperors were all dressed in silk. From the 5th Century A.D. the trade of silk was controlled by the Syrians and the Persas.

Under Ioustinianos, secretly hidden by Orthodox monks, silk worm comes from China to Europe - the export of the silkworm was forbidden.

In 544 A.D. the silkworm arrives to the west. It is cultivated. The Greek climate is ideal for the cultivation of this “gold” worm. The people of Thrace advance the techniques from the Chinese and soon the Greek - Thracian silk is the best in the world. Thrace is a hub of innovation - it’s the Silicon Valley of the western world at the time.

Later, with the crusades many trained technicians from Thrace were taken captive. The importance, the uniqueness and the particularities of the product of Thrace was maintained even during the Ottoman Empire.

If someone were to look at Thrace, on the eve of the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, they could not have failed to express their admiration for the vitality of Hellenism in these areas. Several cities, hub of Greek production and Greek civilization were particularly famous for their viticulture and winemaking. In 1881 in Thrace, including Istanbul, there were 385 rural and urban schools, 81 secondary schools with 626 teachers and 3,000 students at a cost of 522,000 gold Francs.

After the Balkan Wars and the First World War, Greece (caught in the Asia Minor Catastrophe), had to face the problem of reconstruction and recovery of Thrace as well as other areas.

Nowadays, with the passage of time, the message of hope is that the Thracian tradition innovation remains constant. Thracians Macedonians and scientists have offered expertise and latest technology (examples of the Prisma Electronics and Novocaptis) at CERN, the continuous experiment to find the "God particle".

We need to bring back to forefront this dynamism and openness. We need to remember the strategy of Ioustinianos and other leaders in the prime of Hellenism. We need to build an infrastructure to transfer knowledge .

This is the first and the most basic investment for the country's "cocoon" of Thrace - home of silk and mulberry trees. It’s the Silicon Valley continues, but without knowledge of the other Greeks.

What We Need?

We need to realize our strength and dynamics. We need to learn from our history and great leaders.

We can weave the silk road... for Greece. Everyone with his job and his faith in the vision for growth and progress.

Let’s take our life in our hands. We have an obligation and a historic responsibility to determine our destiny and our role in the world and in Europe.