

My impressions from Ambassador of Greece Lecture

On Monday, June 9th 2014, I attended the lecture of H.E. Michel Spinellis, the Greece Ambassador to the United Nations at Utah Valley University (UVU) from 10.00 AM to 10.50 AM in SC 216A auditorium. It was hosted by the office of International Affairs and Diplomacy at UVU with involvement from Utah International Mountain Forum, a coalition of several student clubs at UVU.

His Excellency Michel Spinellis started his lecture by explaining the values of Greece cultures such as architects, music, and dance. He also reminded people about the roots of some words that are original from the Greece such as democracy, academic, politics and athletics. He shared some data about Greece. The Capital city is Athens, total population 11, 280, 167, density 88 inhabitants, area is 131, 960 square km, urban population 61.7%. Ambassador Michel Spinellis's address covered the challenges and opportunities of the European Union.

Greek diplomat gave an overview of the history of Greece's economic downturn as well as an update on their current economic climate. VIP guest from Greece outlined how harshly his nation was hit by the financial crisis in 2008, despite the growth Greece had shown previously. Unemployment floated around 10%, 50% of Greeks reported having a difficult time paying their bills, and Greek banks incurred losses. Youth, who find that it is difficult to find employment, prefer to stay and study abroad and not return home. "According to the latest statistics, of 30,000 Greeks who studied abroad in 2010, 85% haven't returned," said Spinellis. The low portion of youth among nation's population (less than 14% of the population are younger than 14) creates a small base to cover the costs of pensions.

This is the underlying dilemma of the crisis – how to make the Greek state operate more effectively. This is the long-term task that will remain long after the government has achieved its primary budget surplus," said Spinellis. He says Greece has seen the "biggest fiscal rebalancing" in the history of the European Union, but the deficit is one victory, and deeper reform is still needed. Greece has a large tourism industry, which has helped their economic recovery. The country is also contributing to energy solutions in the European Union. Off-shore carbon

deposits were recently discovered and the government will move ahead with exploration and excavation. While these help, the country will continue to work with the euro zone. “It is only by working together, supported by strong fiscal, social and economic policies that improvements and policies can be made,” said Spinellis. “The EU is a project, which is built on working together towards common interests and the common good.”

Those in attendance had the opportunity to ask questions at the end of the lecture, and the conversation turned to relations between Greece and Israel, Turkey, Ukraine, Crimea and Russia. Dee and Jim Williams, who donate funds to UVU’s Office of International Affairs and Diplomacy, were also in attendance. This lecture is particularly appropriate for Williams – her family is from Greece and she recalls the conflict in which Greece lost half of Cyprus to Turkey in 1974.

“I flew to Greece with a gentleman who had been in the war over Cyprus. Turkey came in and took half of Cyprus and that hurt. That was awful to me because I am Greek,” said Williams. Greece is currently in a partnership with Turkey over a gas pipeline from Azerbaijan to Italy. Spinellis said that there is a “bitterness that stays back when [they] see how the international community is reacting in other invasions.” He says 30 years have passed, and they have forgotten it.

The Greek authorities have made significant progress in consolidating the fiscal position and rebalancing the economy. The primary fiscal position is in surplus ahead of schedule, and Greece has gone from having the weakest to the strongest cyclically-adjusted primary fiscal balance in the euro area in just four years. However, several challenges remain to be overcome before stabilization is deemed complete and Greece is back on a sustainable, balanced growth path,”

I really enjoyed the Ambassador of Greece lecture. It was very interesting.

Djiba Soumaoro, UVU student, member of the UIMF