

《Interview: Greece, China transforming Piraeus port into shin》

ATHENS, May 8 (Xinhua) -- Years since Chinese giant COSCO Shipping's arrival at Piraeus port, the image of Greece's largest port has changed dramatically.

Greeks and Chinese continue to work hard together to realize the vision to transform Piraeus into a shining star, Tassos Vamvakidis, a manager of Piraeus Container Terminal S.A (PCT), COSCO Shipping's subsidiary at Piraeus, told Xinhua in a recent interview.

Chinese investors initially took over the upgrade and management of Pier II and III for a span of 35 years from Greeks, while last year COSCO SHIPPING also acquired the majority stake in Piraeus Port Authority (PPA) which manages Pier I.

"There is no comparison between the before and after," Vamvakidis said, pointing to the numbers. In 2010 container handling in Piraeus totaled 880,000 Twenty-foot Equivalent (TEUs,) in 2016 it reached 3.74 million TEUs.

The terminal's connection to the railway in 2013 gave a significant boost to the plan to turn Piraeus into a key transit hub and logistics center for the growing trade between Asia and Europe, also in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Major companies such as HP, SONY, ZTE and Huawei chose the Greek port as their gateway in Europe, saving time and money in the distribution of their products.

The path to success was not rosy. Initially a part of the local society had strong reservations about the investment, fearing that the arrival of a strong Chinese company would exacerbate unemployment rates. Within three years, once they saw that PCT's miracle at Piraeus built by Greeks and Chinese, the climate had changed and today everyone talks about PCT and wants to be on board, Vamvakidis said.

Vamvakidis is on board from day one. Born and raised at Piraeus and working in shipping since 16, the 60-year-old manager is one of the 1,500 Greeks employed at the port.

The Greek manager has learnt a lot working with the Chinese, in particular when facing obstacles. He was impressed with the Chinese side's understanding of the initial atmosphere.

"We faced challenges in the Chinese way: with patience. I think that as someone working closely with the Chinese, I learnt a lot. One of the first lessons I learnt is to be patient and persistent. When you know your goal and you are trying, you are working hard to achieve it, you must also have patience and you will make it," he said.

Vamvakidis feels proud being part of a team which sees its targets fulfilled. He also feels the burden of responsibility working for such a big, landmark project in Sino-Greek cooperation.

COSCO Shipping's investment at Piraeus creates jobs and helps invigorate the ailing economy. The development of logistics platforms for combined transport and value-added services at the port will open bigger horizons for the Greek economy, Vamvakidis noted.

