



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 24 1982

ADDRESS TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE AUSTRALIAN GREEK WELFARE SOCIETY

I welcome the opportunity to be here to celebrate the Society's 10th anniversary. You are a significant contributor to the network of organisations, churches and brotherhoods and regional associations that make such a major contribution to the vitality of Australia's Greek community.

The work of the network serves both Australians of Greek extraction and the whole of Australia's multicultural society. I think I first attended a meeting of the Australian Greek Welfare Group almost a decade ago in December 1973, and knowing the Welfare's reputation for fire-eating, I accepted the invitation with some trepidation. I thought you were going to ask for things like a major review of post-arrival programmes and services; a multicultural television service; funding for ethnic schools; ethnic radio across Australia. On the night, you appeared to be content with briefing me on various other issues, needs and priorities. What I didn't fully grasp was that I had just been condemned to a decade of correspondence from Spiro Moraitis.

Due to their distinctive culture, the Scots have always been equipped to deal appropriately with Greeks bearing gifts. Over the last 10 years we have been taught to be wary of Greeks armed with typewriters. But in the course of that decade, and partly because of such typewriters, a vast amount has been accomplished.

The Australian Greek Welfare Society's community and advocacy role has been a major catalyst for change. Not least, the Australian Greek Welfare Society has urged and advised politicians in both State and Federal spheres on a variety of issues. The issues the Society has pursued with me include welfare, multicultural broadcasting, education, child care, employment and training. We have not always agreed that a particular course of action is the most appropriate, but we have always understood the value of dialogue, of the open expression of viewpoints, and the need for service to Australia.

In all our discussions, I have always appreciated the Society's ability to reach judgments on the basis of the issues themselves rather than on the basis of other concerns. That has made the Society's support on the issues very gratifying, and its criticisms more pointed and more effective. But the Australian Greek Welfare Society is not merely a body demanding action from other people. It has itself acted to deliver service in a number of areas including welfare, child care, youth work and educational and vocational counselling. By its actions, the Australian Greek Welfare Society has shown that those who paternalistically believed that ethnic communities needed help, but could not help themselves, were very wrong indeed.

In 1978, the Galbally Report, of which your own Nick Polites was an author, recognised "the growing capacity and desire of ethnic organisations to provide their own services". We acted on that recognition, and our approach has been vindicated by the recent evaluation of the Galbally Report, particularly in respect to the Grant-in-Aid Scheme, which, I understand, is of some interest to you.

That evaluation found that the Grant-in-Aid Scheme has been very successful. Ethnic groups have been able to establish and extend much needed - and much appreciated - programmes. Bilingual staff have increased substantially, and community groups and organisations are both willing and able to take on even greater responsibilities. On the basis of that evaluation, we are extending the Grant-in-Aid Scheme to further enable community-based agencies, particularly those ethnically based, to provide welfare services to migrants.

Hopefully we have put behind us the specious arguments that special services for ethnic groups, delivered by ethnic groups themselves are a source of division. But they really shouldn't exist or should be done away with at the earliest possible opportunity. All groups need organisations that are particularly sensitive to their own needs, that have a capacity to deal with their clients needs sensitively and with a high degree of cultural and linguistic awareness. I think it is a sign that our growing national maturity that we now recognise that services for migrants are no different from the special services we support for other groups with particular needs in our society. At the same time, however, we should not avoid the realisation that much more needs to be done to make general agencies serve the whole Australian population regardless of their ethnic origin.

Achieving this will require time because large organisations are sometimes resistant to change, but I have no doubt that given a continuous impetus, departments and authorities will increasingly meet the needs of Australia's ethnic groups. That impetus will be given because what we are committed to is not one-off actions, but on-going reform across a broad front. Over the past four years, we have had a major review of post-arrival services; established a multicultural television service, provided funding for ethnic schools; and extended established ethnic radio right across Australia.

We have entered into a major new commitment to implement almost without exception the recommendations of the Galbally report, and I think you will know from the last week that we don't necessarily accept the recommendations of bodies that are put to us. Sometimes we reject recommendations even from Royal Commissions, when they are wrongly based. But the fact that we have overwhelmingly accepted the recommendations of that review, says much for the quality of the review and I hope it says something of the commitment of the Government.

The measures proposed will extend and improve special programmes and services for migrants and most importantly they will considerably enhance the equality of access and opportunity and direct assistance to those who need it most. Over \$200 million has been spent on migrant services and programmes since the Galbally Report, and new expenditures will flow from the Government's overwhelming acceptance of the Galbally evaluations' recommendations.

As you know, the value of the commitments can't be measured in terms of dollars spent. The real value is to be measured in terms of substantive reform. I believe that compared with our starting position, we have brought about a number of profound and significant changes. Perhaps most importantly today Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds are seen to acknowledge what they always knew - that Australians can retain a particular affection for their country of origin and still be Australian in the fullest and best sense of the word. I think one of the best things that I have heard said was when someone from an ethnic community - not from yours, but from another large one - was in Canberra speaking with me a while ago. He said for the first time, in the last 18 months - and he and his family had been here for quite a long while since the War - for the first time in the last 18 months, he felt it was no longer necessary to look over his shoulder. If Government policy had contributed anything to helping achieve that, I think that is the best compliment that could be paid.

We can't afford to take achievements for granted, or slacken our efforts in the future. We have all seen the publicity given to that small but global minority that want to turn back the clock to older days when there was no tolerance. I would like to make it quite clear that this Government has no intention of allowing the voice of bigotry to prevail in Australia, ever, at any time. The achievements which have been made are important to Australia at large. They benefit and they enrich the lives not only of the newest members of the community, but of all Australians, and on behalf of the Government, I reiterate the commitment to a united, just and multicultural Australia.

Some of you will remember that during the visit to Australia last March by President Karamanlis, I announced in recognition of that visit, we would introduce the awards programme. Those awards, two of the first, were awarded tonight. I was delighted to be able to make the announcement of a specific award rather than the general principle, because that again is seeing something happening, not just announcing a policy in a vacuum, but seeing two of the young people from your community who will go to Greece as Australians, and come back with a wider knowledge of Greece.

That I believe is something that could not have happened maybe 5 years ago, certainly it couldn't have happened 10 or 15 years ago. It is very pleasing to see policies come alive with the faces and people that are going to benefit from it. But 5, 10 or 15 years ago, I think if anyone asked if we would see the situation in which there would be Australian Greek President awards for young Australians to go and study for a while in Greece, people would probably have said it would never happen. There have been a number of awards - Churchill Fellowships or the Queen Elizabeth Trust Scholarships for young Australians - have a special relationship to the United Kingdom. There have been some awards that have special relationships with the United States. But I think that now that there are some specific awards which relate to Australia and Greece quite specifically indicates that Australia really has come of age, that Australia has matured, that it's truly the multicultural society and that those narrow, introverted days when this was an Anglo-Saxon community and not much else are really behind us for good. As a result, Australia is a very much better nation than it has ever been before.

I would like to thank you very much for asking me to be here tonight, to help participate in your 10th anniversary. I would like to thank you all very much for what you are doing to help build a more equal and tolerant Australia. I think the whole world at the moment is going through a somewhat difficult time, but I still believe Australia is still the best country in the world in which to bring up a family. Whatever the difficulties may be, I believe there are more opportunities here than in almost any other country in the world. I know that members of the Australian Greek Welfare Society, and the whole Greek community, have contributed enormously to the Australia that we all know and love.

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