



## **2nd Aegean Airlines Pro-Am An International Golf Tournament**

Dear friends and golf fans, I would like to thank you for joining us today.

I would like to point out that throughout our communication activities for the Aegean Airlines Pro-Am this year, our event coincides with other two international events being hosted in Greece; the UEFA Champions League and the Final Four of Euroleague.

For the second year running, the Aegean Airlines Pro-Am will be held, at the Crete Golf Club in Hersonissos between 1st and 3rd June. The Crete Golf Club is designed by Bob Hunt and is an 18-hole Desert Course which combines modern infrastructure, international playing standards and the naturally enhanced environment of the island of Crete. It is only the second time that an international golf event is taking place in Greece under the auspices of the PGAs of Europe and the PGA of Greece. This year the Pro-Am has attracted 180 Greek and foreign golf players and of course a host of visitors and friends of the sport itself.

A Pro-Am event gives the opportunity to amateur players to compete against Professionals, this attracts worldwide interest from field of the golfing environment. The participants this year will form 46 teams from 16 countries. The teams will be made up by one professional (Pro) and three amateur players (Am). This year Ian Wright, the former Arsenal and England international, will also join us with his own team.

It is worth pointing out that the event has attracted top level athletes and we continue to enjoy the support of the Professionals Golfers Association (PGA's) of Europe which is the official body of the game of golf. In addition, the event is operating under the auspices of the PGA of Greece and of the Hellenic Golf Foundation.

This international-calibre sporting event has attracted a number of important sponsors from both the private and the public sector and they appreciate the importance of associating their companies with worldwide events that are hosted in Greece and aim for the upgrading of the Greek tourism product.

Apart from Aegean Airlines S.A, presenting sponsor for the second year is Navarino Resort. At this point, I would like to take the opportunity to mention and thank personally all our sponsors; ALPHA BANK – American Express Cards, Autohellas-Hertz, Maris Hotels, Athens International Airport, VACAR-SAAB, Coca-Cola E3, PUMA and the Prefecture of Crete. The communication sponsor is NET.

The winners will share a purse of 60,000 euros and the amateur players will receive many high value prizes for their performance.

It is worth mentioning that 12,000 euros from the sponsorship funds will be donated to Iliaxtida a local charity based in Crete. An event like ours should be linked with charities whose aim is community support. At this point, I would like to emphasise Aegean Airlines' support towards the golf development in Greece.

Aegean Airlines is a sponsor of both the Hellenic Golf Foundation and the PGA of Greece and carries the title "Official Air Carrier" and "Grand Sponsor" as well as being the creator of the "Whole in One". Aegean Airlines has entered into a partnership with the largest tour operator in Germany, Classic Golf Tours, and with the Porto Carras Grand Resort in Halkidiki, Greece. It also plays an important supporting role for promoting German golfing tourism on the island of Crete.

Aegean Airlines' initiative showcases the airline's role in the strategic development of Greek tourism and the alternative forms of tourism.

The Aegean Airlines Pro-Am – a must-see event – seems to attract a small but very important share of the international market for this very popular sport.

The initiative of the organizers plays an important part in the development of golf in Greece as well as the promotion of the country worldwide. In addition, it focuses on the

implementation of vital decision and initiatives of the government for the quality upgrade and differentiation of Greek Tourism.

Recently the internationally recognized company KPMG presented to its members a survey with the title Golf Benchmark Survey in the EMA region 2006. The focus of the survey was to compare and present the performance of golf courses operating in the fast developing region of South Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa.

**The primary results** are based on statistical figures:

1. A significant number of golf courses operate in the tourism destination which interest our country directly. Specifically Scandinavia has 926 golf courses where 930,000 golfers play and practice.
2. In the UK and Ireland there are 3, 129 golf courses where 1.550.000 golfers play and practice.
3. In the Mediterranean countries of France, Italy, Portugal and Spain which are considered the most competitive and dynamic golf destination in comparison to Greece, have a total of 1,182 golf courses where 586,516 golfers play and practice.
4. In Central Europe (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Holland and Switzerland there are 1,109 golf courses where 952, 134 golfers play and practice.
5. In Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Rumania , Servia, Slovakia and Slovenia – 9 courses) have in total 134 courses where 40, 497 golfers play and practice.
6. Finally, in the Middle East (Bahrain, Israel, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates ) in total have 25 golf courses where 11,700 golfers play and practice. In South Africa there are 456 golf courses where over 145, 000 golfers play and practice.

**The secondary results**, which are based on the qualitative research, showed:

1. The European tourism destinations cover 80% of the total arrivals in Greece and indicate that they are very keen on golf. If we assume that golf is enjoyed during free time it is safe to assume that the opportunities to play this specific sport will be an important criterion when choosing a destination.

2. If our country has an annual arrival figure of between 13 and 14 million without a considerable golf infrastructure, the presence and operation of golf courses (becoming a golf destination) will further increase the annual arrivals, especially during the off-peak period. In other words, a large number of hotels and other enterprises will operate all year round.
3. Finally, with the operation of contemporary golf courses of international standard in our country, not only will the arrivals increase but also all the others sections of the economy (income, employment etc.)

The announcement that 16 new golf courses will be constructed (7 in Messinia-Navarino Resorts, 5 in Cavo Sidero by the Minoan Group, 1 in Porto Carras, 1 in Killada Hills and 2 in Atalandi Hills, etc) will strengthen the golf development in our country with contemporary infrastructure similar to, if not better than, our neighbours.

In the neighbouring countries of Cyprus and Turkey there is feverish golf development taking place. Cyprus currently has three golf courses and another 11 are under planning. Turkey has nine (six of which are situated in Antalya) and in the short term is planning 11 and in the medium term 50 and in the long term 100 thus, becoming an extremely competitive golf destination.

The special tourism infrastructure and, more specifically, the infrastructure with modern facilities and golf courses of international standard need to be closely connected with the organization of sporting events and tournaments in order to bring the desired results .

Recent publications show that government departments are starting to realize the potential that golf will have for our country and this is extremely encouraging. This is just the beginning. Our hope is that future legislation will lead to the building of golf courses with both the tourism accommodation and real estate.

The future looks bright for our country to become apart from a tourism destination, but also a golfing one. The time has come for Greece to have a share of the market that is rightly hers alongside our neighbours.

**Theodore Vassilakis**

**President of Aegean Airlines S.A.**

**President of Organisation Committee Aegean Airlines Pro-Am**