An Interview with
Elias Polythodorakis
Director of Telematic & New Services Department
Hellenic Telecommunications Organization, Greece

Interview by Ram S. Rohan, Software Engineer
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JGIM: What is your view of global information management and telecommunications?

Polythodorakis: It is going to be the engine of growth—not only in Greece but in the whole world. Information technology is present in every field and is becoming a part of the social fabric. There are a lot of “tele-” words—telemedicine, teleprocessing teleworking—and they are all becoming popular and commonplace. Many projects are now in progress in OTE with other technical institutes. Some of these are sponsored by the European Economic Commission (EEC) in order to improve social and economic life in Greece and Europe. It is very difficult not to use information technology. Its services can be extended to almost any field. It will cause a great improvement in many areas both in Greek society and in the worldwide society.

JGIM: What is the current status of regulation of telecommunications in Greece?

Polythodorakis: We face the usual problems any developing country faces. We were a monopoly and are changing to a liberalized environment. The government recently formed a regulatory body called the “National Committee of Telecommunications.” This agency is responsible for regulations and licenses, and for safeguarding the rules of fair competition, similar to the FCC in the United States. The liberalization law itself is being modernized and will be implemented very soon. We expect to overcome the existing bottlenecks through the creation of this new agency and through an emergent European Union plan called the CRASH program which will aid in the fast development of telecommunications in Greece.

Once this happens, we will be in full harmony with the directives of the European Union (EU). OTE is now just a vendor in the telecommunications field, and no longer has a monopoly role. The employees of OTE and the labor unions are beginning to realize that the new environment of liberalization and competition is a reality, that OTE is no longer a monopoly. Two new vendors, both from the private sector are now providing mobile communications within the country.

JGIM: What are your organization’s priorities in this new environment?

Polythodorakis: The main priorities are modernizing existing infrastructure, providing higher bandwidth, developing new services, improving the quality of services and reducing prices. We are making rapid progress in these areas. Three international digital exchanges with a total capacity of more than 24,000 lines have been installed; the last non-digital international exchange is going to be phased out.

Our satellite links with the countries of South America are being digitized and we are building new links with the countries of the former Soviet Union. We are connected to Intelsat, Eutelsat and Inmarsat. A pilot narrow-band ISDN link is under construction with capacity for twelve national exchanges. A wide-area paging system covers major parts of Greece. We already offer X.25 and X.75 networks providing rates of up to 256 Kbps. Frame Relay at 2 Mbps and interconnection to ISDN will be offered shortly. We are connected to both the INTERNET and BITNET networks.

A videotex service is offered throughout Greece, supporting all the European standards and providing access to several applications and databases. Videoconferencing through satellite is also offered. A Message Handling System (MHS) conforming to X.400 and X.500 will be purchased soon and provide services like Electronic Directories, Electronic Mail and EDI. In summary, OTE is reading the market signs and providing rapid technological evolution in Greece.

JGIM: Is providing telecommunication services in your country any different than others?

Polythodorakis: Yes, Greece has many peculiarities. We have lots of islands and many of them are hard to reach. In addition to traditional terrestrial facilities, we need satellite
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