

Floor Statement by Congressman Gus Bilirakis on H. Res. 228, Greek Independence Day Resolution

March 13, 2007

Madame Speaker, I rise today to express my deep pride and respect to the Hellenic Republic as it prepares to celebrate the anniversary of Greek Independence which took place on March 25, 1821. I am almost certain that Thomas Jefferson cast an eye across the Atlantic, towards Greece when he uttered these words in 1821: "The flames kindled on the 4th of July, 1776, have not spread over much of the globe to be extinguished by the feeble engines of despotism---on the contrary, they will consume these engines and all who work them."

It is God's handiwork that I am blessed to straddle two cultures that have been beacons of liberty for all of civilization: the place of my birth, the land of the free and home of the brave, the United States of America AND the land of my ancestors, the birthplace of democracy, the Hellenic Republic.

I honor those brave and resilient Greeks who refused to be assimilated or converted into the Ottoman culture. They endured centuries of torture and persecution to hang on to their precious heritage and faith.

Bishop Germanos of Patras raised the emblem of freedom for Hellenes, the flag bearing a white cross and nine blue and white stripes representing the nine letters in E-L-E-F-T-H-E-R-I-A (FREEDOM). This was an act of defiance against the Ottoman Empire marking the beginning of Greece's War of Independence on March 25, 1821.

Cries of Zito I Ellas and Eleftheria I Thanatos! could be heard from the Ionian to the Aegean, from the Peloponnesus to the Dodocanese.

It took 8 hard fought years until 1829 for the Sultan Mahmud to capitulate and surrender. Greek independence was guaranteed with the Treaty of Adrianople.

Greeks were the first Ottoman subjects to secure recognition as an independent and sovereign nation. It's fierce fight drew support from Philhellenes the world over.

Undoubtedly, these Philhellenes were indebted to Greece, the world's first advanced civilization, for providing a cultural heritage that has influenced the world with firsts in philosophy, politics, mathematics, science, art, and sport just to name a few.

I honor my ancestors for their deep abiding conviction in all that is good and true about mankind. I celebrate their bravery and commitment to liberty and justice. I praise their perseverance and patience in the face of unspeakable hardships. I commend their sacrifices to posterity so that, should there ever be another who seeks to oppress freedom-loving people, we will be able to look upon history and summon up the same courage that those unyielding Hellenes exhibited nearly two centuries ago.

Just as our great Founding Fathers studied the model of democracy the ancient Greeks put forth, it is likely our revolution for Independence in the late 18th century served as a blueprint for the early 19th century Greeks to try their hand at freedom and sovereignty. It's a beautiful symbiotic relationship that the United States and Greece has shared since, and continues to enjoy.

As George Washington proclaimed at the onset of the American Revolution, "Our cause is noble, it's the cause of mankind." So it was in 1776 America and 1821 Greece and so it will always remain.

Zito I Ellas and God bless America!