

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 Peloponeseus 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!