

THE STARS ARE ALIGNING IN THE U.S. FOR HELLENIC AND ORTHODOX ISSUES

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In light of the United States' past record, the people of Greece have every right to be wary of American officials becoming deeply involved in Greek matters. As members of a Greek-American family that has been fighting in Washington, DC for Hellenic and Orthodox issues at the highest levels of the American government for over 80 years, no one has witnessed more of these bad policies up close than we.

However, we write this piece to let you know that today is different. The stars seem to be aligning. Most encouraging, the #2 person in the White House, Vice President Joe Biden, framed and proudly displayed on his wall the headline of my publically referring to him as Joe "Bidenopoulos" immediately following his election in 2008. Biden remains a lifetime loyal friend. And our President, Barack Obama, together with his Secretary of Treasury, Jack Lew, may be referred to as Greece's best friends in recent negotiations to keep Greece in the EU.

One of the stars at the moment, believe it or not, is your traditionally bellicose neighbor Turkey. The very Prime Minister who, just a few months ago, said, "Americans enjoy watching our children die" has shifted his rhetoric and in recent weeks seems to have concluded that he needs America as much or more than we need him. This circumstance significantly reduces the prospect of the US again overlooking Hellenic and Orthodox problems in an effort to curry favor with Turkey.

Additionally, those on Capitol Hill who occupy leadership positions on the House Foreign Affairs and Senate Foreign Relations Committees are knowledgeable and powerful philhellenes. And, unlike the prevailing current in years past, they hail from both parties -- Republicans and Democrats. So what does this mean for Greece's Great Depression, the continued occupation of Cyprus and the religious freedom of the Ecumenical Patriarchate? The answer -- it could mean a great deal.

In regard to Greece's economic crisis, American involvement means that, for the first time, our government -- from the most senior officials at the White House on down -- is working with us in the Greek-American community to try to find feasible efforts that can ease Greek budget demands and stimulate economic growth for the Greek people. And, if Greece is able to reform some practices that virtually everyone, including most of the Greek people, believes need reforming, America may see ways of helping to ease Greece's paralyzing debt repayments.

For Cyprus, it could mean that Turkey will become increasingly receptive to America calling for an end to its illegal occupation. Vice President Biden has an unparalleled knowledge of this subject and remains tremendously committed to the wellbeing of Greek and Turkish Cypriots. The Vice President has also maintained his effort to help Turkey understand why its withdrawal from Cyprus is truly in its best long-term interest. And, fortuitously, Turkey's few years of interest in Cypriot natural gas has been joined by its newly realized belief that its troops on Cyprus and Cypriot budget expenditures may be better used to defend its homeland. This is an additional incentive to Turkey ending its over forty-one-year occupation.

Regarding the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Turkey has still not reopened the Halki Seminary, has not enabled the properties of the Ecumenical Patriarch to be returned and has neglected to recognize the Ecumenical Patriarch as the spiritual head of the second largest Christian Church in the world. However, the government's relationship with the Ecumenical Patriarchate has improved in the last decade. And interestingly, as Turkey's relationship with the west degenerated badly in recent years, its relationship with the Ecumenical Patriarchate has not gotten worse.

A few years ago, Vice President Biden described Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew as one of the two most Christ-like people he had ever met. President Barack Obama and philhellenes within the U.S. Congress also regard the Ecumenical Patriarch with the highest esteem and strongly support Turkey allowing his religious freedom.

As you can see, at this very moment, from the American perspective the stars are more aligned for Hellenic and Orthodox issues than every before. But, in this swiftly changing Eastern Mediterranean world, we have no way of knowing how long these fortuitous circumstances will last. It appears as though the most powerful country in the world, America, is primed to use some of its power to help Hellenic and Orthodox issues. And, you can rest assured, that from our inside vantage point we will be sure to inform you if change threatens the current orientations.

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