



## Emerging Voices of Greek America

*We are pleased to present five short essays by a new generation of Greek American students who deal with various aspects of Hellenic culture. Corinne Candilis (Winsor School, Boston) begins with a look at the present Greek crisis and how it relates to the American financial crisis. Aletha Vassilakis (University of California-San Diego), Alexos Angelo (Trinity University, San Antonia College), Anna Tsiotsia (University of Pennsylvania, and Andrew M. Pernokas (Boston College-College of Arts and Sciences) report on their participation in the fourth annual American Hellenic Institute's Foreign Policy College Student Trip to Greece and Cyprus.*

### Austerity: Not the Answer for Europe or the United States

*Corinne Candilis*

In the near and longer-term future, the American Congress must deal with key decisions about the ratio between raising taxes and cutting spending. At the same time, the Eurozone has formally entered a double-dip recession and Greek protests against German Prime Minister Merkel and others pressing for uncompromising austerity have spread across Europe. Perhaps, some important guidance for the American government can be derived from the European crisis.

Amid Europe's dire economic crisis, Germany had assumed the role of hero of the Euro zone. Germany had extended economic aid to countries, most notably in Greece, whose economies may now be too damaged even to maintain the common currency. But aid comes with harsh austerity measures that Germany is implementing for its own political interests, not the interest of the continent,

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much less Greece. For several countries, the cost of German aid now outweighs the benefits for Europe, and that could be a lesson for US politicians.

The Greek economy specifically has suffered from labor featherbedding, tax evasion, and an out-of-control patronage system, all of which influenced the government to spend beyond its means. Because Greece cannot simply devalue its currency (only the European Central Bank can do that), it is forced to borrow from Germany and countless sources within the Eurozone. Germany, the richest of the Euro countries, is eager to keep Greece from leaving the Euro and from defaulting on its debt for fear of what might result from a Greek exit. Many speculate that a "Grexit" would result in a loss of investor confidence and the departure from the Euro by nations such as Italy and Spain, which have large economies.

This German strategy comes at a great cost. Against the advice of its allies and economists across the globe, Germany continues to insist that Greece, Italy, and Spain implement harsh austerity measures as the price of receiving aid and preserving their place in the Euro zone. Under these austerity measures, which include deep cuts in government spending and increases in taxes, Greek's growth has been slow while tax evasion remains high. Austerity measures for Greece clearly aren't working, nor have they worked for other countries. Great Britain is a prime example. So why is Germany so adamant?

Enter German politics and the lesson for the United States. Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union has barely held on to a parliamentary majority since the 2005 election. It survives through a coalition with the Christian Social Union of Bavaria (CSU) and the Free Democratic Party (FDP), both fiscally conservative parties. But even with their similarities in philosophy, the FDP has been causing Merkel's party trouble.

The FDP suffered major losses in the 2011 state elections for promising tax cuts for Germans that became impossible to deliver. It sheepishly admitted that in the current European crisis, tax cuts were no longer plausible. The German people are rightly frustrated that their tax dollars are supporting dysfunctional foreign governments. Merkel, therefore, is forced into a position where she must simultaneously hold together the Euro and convince her people that she is fighting to protect their hard-earned money. The solution to both problems, she believes, is forcing increasingly insolvent countries to implement austerity measures—in essence, punishing irresponsible governments by cutting their spending. While this may convince German voters that Merkel is fighting for

*them*, it is keeping countries such as Greece, Spain, and Italy from growing out of their recessions and it makes a Greek default of some kind almost inevitable.

Merkel is simply doing what any other political leader would: fighting for the well being of her people. But Merkel isn't leading just any political negotiation. She is at the heart of one of the most devastating economic crises in modern European history, and if she wishes to resolve it, she needs to put the economic good of the continent before her own poll numbers.

The failed austerity measures so beloved by Germany should be a lesson to the American Congress. Cuts in government spending do not promote growth. The proof is not only in Europe's prolonged recession but also in the clear political motivation of austerity advocates like Merkel and others devoted to reducing the size of government. Although there are calls from both sides of the aisle for spending cuts, our Congressional leaders should realize that austerity is not the answer for either Europe or the United States.

## The Trip of a Lifetime

### *Aletha Vassilakis*

I cannot thank AHI enough for the amazing experience it provided me through this once once-in-a-lifetime trip to Cyprus and Greece. I have never learned so much in such a short amount of time and the opportunities I had through this trip were incredible. From meeting the presidents of both Cyprus and Greece to visiting the UN buffer zone on Cyprus, AHI put together an itinerary that I believe no other organization could have accomplished.

This trip changed my life. It opened my eyes to not only the conflicts that Greece and Cyprus face on a daily basis, but this trip also changed my interest in international conflicts into a passion that I intend to pursue. Seeing how Greece and Cyprus interact with their neighbors and with the United States convinced me that someday I want to contribute to building these relationships.

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The event of the trip that had the most impact on me was the two days we spent visiting the occupied territory in Cyprus and the UN buffer zone. It's one thing to hear about decades of violence and oppression, but seeing it firsthand was an irreplaceable experience. It showed me the gargantuan effort needed to keep up with day to day functions because of the occupation. To see Cyprus not only overcome these obstacles but to push beyond them to become a successful country was truly amazing. These are things you cannot learn through reading a book or keeping up with the news; only a trip such as the one that AHI put together can really show the full scope of the conflict in Cyprus. We saw soldiers standing with guns at the ready at all times, the abandoned airport left to rot at the prime of its day, and the countless number of desecrated churches and abandoned homes. Standing on the beach in Nicosia and looking up at the charred remains of the hotels lining the beach with armed soldiers to my left and blonde tourists playing in the shadows of the ghost town on that beach to my right will be forever etched in my memory. As I stood there, I couldn't see the tourists playing in the surf but instead I could see all the friends we made on Cyprus when as children they ran onto the beach with their families in nothing but sandals and shorts, to escape the paratroopers and bombs close behind them. Seeing the conflict that Cypriots have been forced to face on a daily basis for over forty years was deeply moving. Since my return I have given three lectures to help educate others on the issues regarding Cyprus and I intend to continue spreading awareness of this issue.

The time we spent in Athens was just as eye-opening for me. I was amazed that we were able to get such an up-close look at the issues Greece currently faces and the inner workings of the Greek government. I left Greece with a greater appreciation for the difficulty of coming to decisions when there are so many people that need to agree and so many unknown variables that could render the decision useless or even damaging. What I learned in my time in Greece will not only help me with my upcoming senior thesis which I plan to focus on the Greek economic crisis, but it also helped me realize that international politics is not just something I want to focus on in college, but, instead, it's a passion that I intend to follow in my career as well.

I am extremely grateful to the AHI organization and Nick Larigakis for all the hard work they put into making this trip such an incredible experience. Even with all of the political turbulence leading up to the trip, AHI was able to put on a trip that went above and beyond all of my wildest dreams. I know the friends and memories I made on this trip will last a lifetime.

## Where Does the Future Lay?

*Alexis Angelo*

As our small group of young Greek-American university students entered the buffer zone dividing north and south Cyprus, I immediately felt the pressure of the Turkish forces. One by one we lined up for a type of border check, where Turkish troops recorded our passport information. To them we were entering the borders of the Turkish Northern Republic of Cyprus, a satellite state of Turkey. It was an intimidating process and continued to be as we drove into the territory. Every twenty kilometers or so we passed another Turkish outpost, and every ten kilometers we passed military signs with an image of a soldier specifying “forbidden zone.” The presence of the Turkish government was inescapable with every turn. We visited leveled gravesites where the headstones of the previous Cypriots who had lived in the north over forty years ago had been completely discarded. Property rights no longer exist in the north where settlers from Turkey live in the abandoned homes of those who were forced to the south in 1974. We visited an Orthodox church, which had been completely stripped of its interior and anything worth monetary value. All that could be found inside was a single plaque with the name of the holy space—now used as a shelter for pigeons.

Fresh from the AHI program I felt driven to make a difference with the Cyprus issue but now that it's been a bit of time since the program, I'm feeling more discouraged. During our visits, the perspective I tried to take on was that of an American interest. But I look back at my experience now and ask myself, “Where is the American interest?” If there was substantial American interest then there would already be American support and initiatives with the Cyprus issue. But compared to America's other allies in the region (yes I'm speaking of Turkey) Cyprus is an irrelevant country, so there is no American interest.

The question then is how do we alter this process and add interest where currently there is little? Is the human rights issue the means to engage American interest? I think not. It seems that human rights issues are empty “political punch lines” as Nick Larigakis often points out. All the Cypriots we spoke with seemed

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to draw a similar scenario. What if the Cyprus issue were happening in America? What if America was split at the Mason Dixon line and everyone north was forced south and lost their property? What if American religious establishments were desecrated and stripped down to skeletons? What if there were still a significant number of missing persons from an event that occurred forty years ago? What would the US expectations be for their own population? Why are these same standards not applied to the Republic of Cyprus? I have come to the disappointing and frustrating conclusion that these standards are expected for Americans because we are a great global super power. But Cyprus is a small, powerless country whose geostrategic value doesn't seem to be enough to be its saving grace. The disappointing truth I have come to believe is that the United States gives a blind eye to gross injustices and human rights violations unless they involve its own citizens or have strategic relevance to the US. Only then is action deemed necessary. I find myself discouraged by American actions, not because my country is looking out for its own interests, all countries should be aware of their own interests, but because we are willing to give a blind eye to human rights violations.

How then can we increase American interest in the real problems of Cyprus? Why should the US government act to help Cyprus or reprimand Turkey when the action of changing the stagnant status quo of the last forty years would potentially jeopardize American relations with Turkey? The hope that remains is the recent discovery of hydrocarbons off the coast of Cyprus and Israel, and Cyprus's current relations with Israel. This discovery is very promising. For the European region it may mean they will no longer have to rely on Russian resources. For Cyprus, it can provide the strategic economic leverage that they have been desperately seeking to finally solve the Cyprus issue for both Turkish-Cypriot and Greek-Cypriot communities. However this future is still undetermined and hazy. Despite these recent discoveries and relations, Turkey claims that Cyprus has no continental shelf and has no rights to assets in the ocean. Therefore, Turkey claims the entire ocean off its coast extending its sea border to Libya. Turkey is the only country that has made this claim and other countries have not agreed with this declaration. Nonetheless, the future of the Republic of Cyprus has the potential to be altered and resolved with the new opportunities provided by this recent hydrocarbon discovery and business alliance with Israel. The Cypriot problem may be solvable yet, especially with the interest of Israel and the potential for American interest due to the close ties between the United States and Israel.

# The Military-Industrial Meltdown

*Anna Tsiotsias*

Greece desperately needs a lifeline. In his last visit, EU commissioner Barroso warned Greece about their precarious economic future. In order to receive this next, much needed, tranche, Greece needs to convince the European Commission that it can, and will cut 14.5 billion Euros from its spending over the next two years. However, after cutting bailout after bailout check, Greece's promises are looking as empty as their coffers. Should Greece fail to receive the next installment from the troika, the country will not be able to inject essential capital into its banks, the government will be unable to pay salaries and pensions for all those working in the public sector, and the economy will freeze. Should this happen, Greece's exit from the Euro would be imminent and I believe it will lead the economies of the European Union, United States, and the rest of the world farther into recession.

The shaky coalition government, yoked by the unpopularity of austerity measures, has attempted to accomplish these reforms. The administration has made some headway on the most recent round of budget cuts. On Tuesday, August 7, 2012, Finance Minister Yannis Stournaras reported that, "We are not there yet. We still need EUR3.5 billion to EUR4 billion." However, for a country that has already gutted most of their budget, 3.5 to 4 billion Euros is no small feat. As Greece comes closer and closer to the deadline, the task Mr. Samaras faces is daunting—but it can be done.

Austerity has left the defense budget largely untouched. In just this past year, Greece spent about 4.6 billion Euros on defense, making up about 2.1 percent of its economic output, in contrast with other European NATO members, who spend about 1.6 percent on average, with Germany spending 1.4 percent.

After attending a briefing at the Hellenic Ministry of National Defense by Colonel Dimokritos Zervakis, receiving a briefing in the Control Room at the Ministry, and attending another briefing at an Army tank training facility

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organized by the American Hellenic Institute Foundation Foreign Policy Trip to Greece and Cyprus, it is evident that Hellenic armed forces are extremely committed to regional security and defense. With 1,300 tanks, Apache helicopters, state of the art submarines, warships and F-16s, let there be no mistake, the Hellenic Armed Forces are ready and waiting.

But what exactly are they ready for?

Despite participation in a bevy of NATO security efforts, the high degree of Greek defense spending can be attributed to the looming Turkish threat. Since Turkey invaded Cyprus in 1974, Greece has spent upward of 216 billion Euros on armaments alone. Greece also maintains a large number of bases and outposts on the border with Turkey, most recently moving 1800 officers to the Turkish border to hedge against a possible influx of Syrian refugees. Further, Turkey has also antagonized Greece through numerous violations of Greece's sovereign air space and brinkmanship in Greece's Aegean territorial waters. Each illegal flyover in Greek airspace, each person who illegally crosses the border between Greece and Turkey, and each intrusion into Greek territorial waters costs Greece more in defense spending, checks that should, and eventually will, bounce.

Greece, in short, has been spending billions and billions of Euros defending against Turkey, another NATO member that made a commitment to regional security. Defending against a supposed ally is a paradox, and a costly one at that. This paradox begs the question—why does Turkey continue to antagonize while Greece flounders on the brink of economic collapse?

That Turkey continues to exercise its regional power and military might by violating Greek sovereignty is no to the European Union and the United States, but to stop it would deprive Germany and other Western nations of a huge amount of arms revenue, revenue that allows their economies to thrive while the Greek one suffers. The United States, Germany, and France are the three biggest exporters of arms to Greece. Greece is Germany's largest European market for arms sales and 42 % of Greece's total arms come from the United States.

With the deadline for the next tranche of funding for Greece quickly approaching and the German vice chancellor saying that the prospect of a Greek exit from the Euro has "lost its terror," it is time to ask what is more terrifying: a Greek exit from the Eurozone that would cost the economies of the world trillions of dollars in revenue loss and leave a sluggish world economy in its wake, or a loss of arms revenue from sales to Greece that would help enable Greece to meet the requirements for the next tranche of troika funds?

Greece needs political, not just fiscal capital. The qualifications for the next tranche can be met and Greece can be saved from the financial cliff, but only with a much-needed injection of capital from the EU. The United States and the European Union also have the political power to send a message to Turkey to stop violations of sovereign air and sea space and to achieve an agreement with Turkey to secure Greek borders. Article 5 of the NATO charter states that an attack on one is an attack on all. This time, the attack is monetary, not military. These NATO members—Turkey, Germany, Greece, and the United States—need to start acting like allies. The Western world needs to stand up to Turkey to balance the increasing military antagonism in the Mediterranean. With the threat of a Greek exit from the Euro and a resulting world economic downturn, the stakes are too high not to take action.

## A Call to Action

*Andrew M. Pernokas*

Irrespective of borders, enemies, critics and pessimists, Hellenism faces a threat that is unlike any foe it has ever encountered. Greece has been crippled by a deep political crisis for the last two decades. As Greeks struggle to pursue a future in a country that is beginning to decay, their government “leaders” have brought their nation to a tipping point. The virtues of equality, integrity, honesty, and morality have been abandoned for the gratification of nepotism, greed, and pork barreling. Economically speaking, Greece has a GDP to debt ratio of 165.3%, the largest in the Eurozone, and has yet to implement the majority of austerity measures they have been required to by the troika.<sup>1</sup> S&P’s projection of the Greek debt crisis is “negative” and with an 11% shrink in GDP, Greece is not moving towards job creation (in the private sector) or growth.<sup>2</sup>

While Cyprus shares a similar economic profile, the “Cyprus Question” is the most serious threat faced by international Hellenism. With almost forty years of illegal occupation of Cyprus, ethnic cleansing, and illegal settling of the occupied

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territory, Turkey threatens the identity of Cyprus as a Hellenic nation. Turkey is guilty of crimes against humanity and is in violation of at least half of the Geneva Convention prohibitions cited in Article 154 of the fourth Geneva Convention, of which, Turkey is a signatory.<sup>3</sup> Despite the clear and brazen violation of international law by Turkey, the Cyprus issue has stagnated and is quickly rendering a generation that is apathetic to the condition of its country and has accepted the status quo.

At first glance, the Greek (Hellenic) condition seems fatal and absent of any saving grace. However, Greece and Cyprus have perhaps the greatest untapped resource in the world. The Greek Diaspora has resulted in millions of Greeks living in nations on every continent. In the United States, the diaspora numbers a bit over a million persons that have achieved high social status and economic prosperity. I believe that these Greek Americans have an obligation to assist and address the concerns that face the Greeks of Cyprus and Greece.

A frustrated and defeated morale in Cyprus has led to the appearance of surrender. However, Cyprus is a nation that is the victim of negligence by the United States and the leaders of the world, who have failed to uphold the responsibilities of their positions and enforce the laws of the international community. Over the last four to ten years, Turkey has risen to a level of priority in U.S. foreign policy and has been the recipient of attention, support, and protection from the United States government. This comes at the expense of Cyprus and Greece, a long-standing American ally. Yet, the question has been posed, why help a country whose citizens do not want to help themselves? It is such a question and such a mentality that risks the possibility of a resolution to the Cyprus Question and serves as an excuse for a lack of action. Consider the converse: as Americans would we accept a policy which tells an oppressed and restricted people to, "Give up your dreams of freedom because to save our own skin, we are willing to make a deal with your slave masters."<sup>4</sup> That's not to say that action on the Cyprus Question should be a purely unilateral, only that it falls on the shoulders of the Hellenic American community to convince our politicians that their pro-Turkey policy is misguided. Turkey is a nation with which the United States does not find common interest in the rule of law. Unfortunately, the Cypriot government, even with the backing of the European Union, cannot combat the influence of Turkey with the same magnitude as the United States would be able to.

The crisis in Greece is one of greater complexity where much needs to be done in the realm of public opinion. Greek Americans can be a part of a rebirth in the

Greek enterprise. We need to encourage business, investment, and tourism; and we need to combat the negative and false representation of Greece in the news media. It would be overreaching to imply that the Greek political machine can be changed so easily, but by promoting the image of an open Greece, perception will change in the country's favor. Lastly, those in Greece struggling to feed their families, especially the unemployed, can be and should be assisted by a massive Greek American effort.

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<sup>1</sup>[http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Structure\\_of\\_government\\_debt](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Structure_of_government_debt)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-08-07/greece-rating-outlook-cut-to-negative-by-s-p-as-economy-weakens.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/COM/380-600177?OpenDocument>

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Reagan, "A Time For Choosing", Paragraph 31 Line 3

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