



## U.S.-Greece Relations and Regional Issues

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Chairman Wexler, distinguished members of the subcommittee, I thank you for allowing me to discuss a topic of great importance, one to which this Administration and the U.S. Congress are both strongly committed: the U.S.-Greece bilateral relationship. I had the privilege of serving as the United States Ambassador to Greece from 1997 to 2001, and I am proud to be among the many Philhellenes in the United States. I also want to recognize the Ambassador of the Hellenic Republic to the United States, the Honorable Alexandros Mallias, who is a dynamic advocate for U.S.-Greece relations. I thank him for his presence here today.

Let there be no doubt: Greece is a strategic Ally of the United States. As President Bush noted in his proclamation on Greek Independence Day last March, "Our two nations, were both born in the belief of liberty and self-determination, sharing common cultural bonds and national values. These bonds are strengthened by a mutual commitment to democracy and freedom worldwide."

Americans helped the Greeks to win their independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1821. Americans came to Greece's aid through the Marshall Plan from 1947 to 1948. We delivered invaluable political and military assistance to Greece's democratic forces during the Greek civil war. We have been a strong ally of Greece in NATO and have admired Greece's role in the EU during the last three decades. We have stood together in every major conflict of the last century, including the World Wars, the Cold War, and the crises in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan.

These common values and beliefs are embodied by the millions of Americans who trace their ancestry to Greece, have enriched our own country and inextricably bind our two countries. The Greek-American community is the strongest and most durable bridge linking our two countries. Greek-Americans have established hundreds of fraternal organizations that provide support services and friendship to the Greek people. They have helped to stimulate trade, investment and two-way tourism. Our Greek-American community represents American values and interests in their interactions with the Greek people. Greek-Americans are invaluable to this relationship. I could not have done my job as Ambassador without them.

As members of the Trans-Atlantic community and as NATO Allies, we work together to advance shared interests in Europe and around the world. Whether working together to stem the tide of nuclear proliferation or the trafficking of persons and illicit materials, or to protect the environment, our shared interests bring us together time and time again.

I believe that the close people-to-people ties between our two nations explain why Americans were so affected by the devastating wildfires that ravaged Greece this summer. I am confident that everyone here today can appreciate the parallels with the recent wildfires in southern California. Both events remind us that, in times of disaster, we rely on our friends and allies. I am pleased to report that the U. S. Government provided over \$1.9 million in assistance to Greece, including cash donations to the Hellenic Red Cross, non-perishable commodities, and funding for a team of experts to provide technical assistance in emergency management and reconstruction. In addition to this assistance from the U.S. Government, prominent Greek-Americans and Greek-American organizations were quick to come to the aid of Greek citizens affected by the fires. Americans' generosity helped with the vital rehabilitation following this disaster. We look forward to continued, robust cooperation between Greek and American firefighters and reconstruction experts.

In the Balkans, the United States and Greece share a strong interest in ensuring that Greece's neighbors move forward on a path towards integration with NATO and the European Union. Greece's leadership and economic investment in the region have helped promote rapidly growing economies, create jobs and infrastructure, and bring a sense of stability to the region.

Greece has significant economic ties with its neighbors in the Balkans. The level of Greek investment in Albania, Serbia, including Kosovo, Montenegro, and Macedonia, reached 3.5 billion euros last year. Greece's trade relations with its neighbors are also strong. Greece has taken full advantage of new economic opportunities in the Balkans, with a new market of 50 million consumers, and has had a stable level of trade of approximately 1.5 billion euros over the last six years. Greece has also provided considerable economic assistance to its Balkan neighbors. In 2002, Greece launched a five-year aid initiative called the Hellenic Plan for Economic Reconstruction of the Balkans. This is a 700 million dollar program designed to aid the economic development of Greece's Balkan neighbors, including Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Romania.

The Balkans will require continued attention in the coming months and years to ensure a lasting peace, an ongoing economic transformation, and a permanent integration of all countries in the region into Euro-Atlantic institutions. Kosovo – the last unresolved legacy of the Milosevic regime – must see its status clarified. The United States has made this a priority for the coming months. The United States supports the EU/Russia/U.S. Troika-led negotiations as a final attempt to find a mutually agreed solution, but remains firm that its mandate will conclude on December 10.

In the absence of an agreement negotiated by December 10, the United States believes the plan for supervised independence, outlined by the UN Special Envoy Maarti Ahtisaari, is the best way forward. As a partner in NATO's Kosovo Force, Greece shares our interest in a timely resolution of this problem that maintains regional stability and ensures the rights of religious and ethnic minorities. We are working to ensure that the concerns of all parties are addressed in the negotiations now underway, but firmly believe a timely resolution of Kosovo's status must be achieved.

In the same vein, the United States and Greece share an interest in a prosperous Macedonia, one that is stable economically, politically and militarily. Macedonia has made great strides in these areas and has participated in NATO's Membership Action Plan for a number of years. This does not mean that Macedonia is guaranteed an invitation to join NATO at the Bucharest Summit this April. Our firm view is that Macedonia should be judged strictly on its merits, specifically whether it has met NATO's performance based standards.

Macedonia should not be denied an invitation to NATO for any reason other than failure to meet the substantive qualifications for entry. In Greece, some have raised the possibility of vetoing an invitation to Macedonia unless the "name issue" is resolved. While the United States agrees on the importance of resolving the name issue, we do not think that disagreement on the name alone is reason to block Macedonia's membership in international organizations.

At the same time, the name "Macedonia" is close to the heart of Greek citizens and is central and significant to the history of Greece itself. The United States is firmly committed to the UN process led by Ambassador Matt Nimetz to resolve this issue – as well as adherence to the 1995 Interim Accord, which allows Macedonia to enter regional and international organizations under the name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. We believe our NATO ally Greece and Macedonia are fully capable of working quietly, constructively and directly with each other and within the UN framework to reach a solution. We ask that the Macedonian government make a special effort to work with the Greek government to find a solution with which both countries can live. We ask for a spirit of compromise on both sides. The United States cannot impose a solution on either side. Finding a solution acceptable by both countries is something they need to do themselves.

It often takes considerable time for countries to join NATO. Spain didn't join until 23 years after NATO was created. It took the Baltic countries 11 years to join after their independence. But in every instance of a new member joining NATO, enlargement has benefited the Alliance and advanced peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic area. I think we all agree it is in everyone's interest to see Macedonia become a stable and cooperative neighbor of Greece and part of the NATO alliance.

Another interest that we closely share with Greece is our commitment to the diversification of energy sources and suppliers, particularly the advancement of reliable, long-term flows of oil and natural gas from the Caspian region. Energy security is inextricably linked with national security and economic prosperity. Global economic growth and stability depends on adequate, reliable and affordable supplies of energy. Greece's central position between energy producers in the Caspian and energy markets in Western Europe means that Greece has a major role to play in helping Caspian energy find its way to a wider market.

The Turkey-Greece-Italy Interconnector (TGI) pipeline will bring Azerbaijani gas to Europe, increasing the diversity of energy supply and promoting the stability and economic prosperity of the Caspian nations. It will help to ensure that no one country will hold a monopoly on energy flows to our allies in Western and Central Europe. TGI is making solid progress. The upcoming inauguration of the Turkey-Greece portion later this month will usher in the first Azerbaijani gas exports to the EU-15. Ultimately, a trans-Adriatic link will connect the gas grids of Greece and Italy, providing a reliable flow of diversified gas supply from Azerbaijan and, potentially, other Caspian nations.

Finally, I am happy to say that we continue to cooperate closely with the Government of Greece on Greece's participation in the Visa Waiver Program. At the end of this month, the Department of Homeland Security plans to send an assessment team to Greece. The DHS team will assess Greece's readiness to participate in the Visa Waiver Program and the potential impact on U.S. security, law enforcement and immigration interests should Greece join. While this process will take some time before a decision is reached, the Government of Greece has told us that it is ready and able to meet the stringent requirements for participation. That is good news – for Greece, the United States and the business and personal ties between our two countries.

In conclusion, I want to underscore that which we treasure: the deep historical ties between the United States and Greece. We continue to work to broaden and deepen our relations. The relationship between our two countries is the best it has been in decades. We have excellent relations with Prime Minister Karamanlis and Foreign Minister Bakoyannis, and are grateful to both for their strong support of a closer U.S.-Greece alliance during their time in office. We are working together to promote peace and stability in Greece's neighborhood, the broader Middle East, and beyond. We know we can count on our Greek friends and allies to meet these challenges, and Greece can count on us.

I thank you for the opportunity to come before you today, and welcome any questions you may have.

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