

The National Herald

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reporting the news and addressing the issues of paramount interest to the Greek-American community of the United States of America.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

There's More to Write About than the Church

To the Editor:

Is it really necessary for every edition of your newspaper to have an article or a commentary about the Church. I mean no disrespect to the Archdiocese or any of the parishes you write about, but there is so much more to the community than that.

A few years ago I read a reference in the paper, or maybe it was in a subscription renewal letter, that the Herald considers itself the newspaper of record of the community.

That's what the New York Times calls itself. The Times comes out every day. In one week there are seven editions.

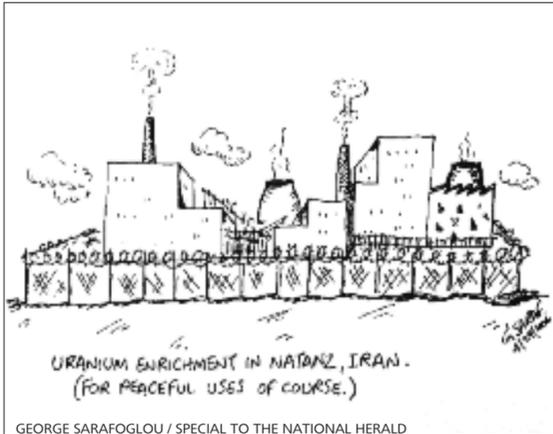
And in America there are hundreds of thousands of Churches, compared with, what 500 in the Archdiocese?

I swear, weeks go by without my seeing an article in the Times about a Church or a synagogue. Does the Times have an axe to grind? I doubt it. They just have more important things to do, and so does Theodore Kalmoukos, whose articles I enjoy.

Thomas Markos
Los Angeles, CA

TO OUR READERS

The National Herald welcomes letters from its readers intended for publication. They should include the writer's name, address, and telephone number and be addressed to: The Editor, The National Herald, 37-10 30th Street, Long Island City, NY 11101. Letters can also be faxed to (718) 472-0510 or e-mailed to scaros@thenationalherald.com. We reserve the right to edit letters for publication and regret that we are unable to acknowledge or return those left unpublished.



GEORGE SARAFIOGLOU / SPECIAL TO THE NATIONAL HERALD

By Dan Georgakas and Constantinos E. Scaros

From time to time, an issue emerges and inspires various minds to converge, often at odds with one another, to discuss it. Hopefully, collective enlightenment will result from such conversations. The An-

America's Role in the World: Time to Move Past Ukraine and Declare New Normalcy?

GEORAKAS PRESENTS HIS POINT OF VIEW

Dino, These past few weeks we have discussed what conditions warrant direct or indirect American military action in international affairs. The current crisis in the Ukraine is the latest focus of such consideration. Americans need to ask if our vital national interests or national security is at stake.

The economic interactions between the United States and Ukraine are miniscule. Indeed, the largest sums involved are the billions in financial and military aid by the U.S., sums that would be better spent at home. The oil pipeline that runs through Ukraine is vital to Europe, but not to us. Our general meddling in the social unrest in Ukraine involves an outdated Russophobia that was previously evident in our actions in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, and other states bordering Russia.

In contrast, Russia's interests in the Ukraine are vital. The specter of NATO bases in Ukraine, a proposal raised by some American politicians, is equivalent to having Russian bases in Canada or Mexico. We've already shown that it was intolerable for us to accept Russian missiles in Cuba. Russia feels the same about the military posture of its neighboring states.

Surely, Ukraine needs to keep free of military alignments with the West if it wishes to normalize relations with Russia.

The EU's vital interests in Ukraine are not limited to the fact that the bulk of gas and oil used by the EU comes from Russia via Ukraine. The EU and Russian have numerous and broadly-based economic connections. That economic reality assures that the EU will not impose serious sanctions on Russia. American hawks have suggested suspending all flights between Russia and the United States. You can bet the farm that no such cessations will occur in Europe.

Ukraine, of course, is concerned about its national integrity. Crimea, once unilaterally ceded to Ukraine by Russia, has been reclaimed. A section of eastern Ukraine has been seized by pro-Russian separatists. Whatever the specific outcome of that conflict, Ukraine remains totally dependent on Russian oil and gas. In due course, Ukraine needs to find a path that allows it to trade with the West and Russia without being absorbed by either.

President Obama has kept a cool head and refers to the downing of the Malaysian plane as an accident. In contrast, former Republican presidential nominee Senator John McCain has led the

call to escalate the violence by shipping more military hardware into the area and toughening anti-Russian sanctions. Republican presidential hopeful Senator Rand Paul urges immediate restraint while advocating that the U.S. replace Russia as the EU's major provider of gas and oil. This works nicely for American interests but is unlikely. Europeans are wary about being dominated by the U.S. and have the longer-term perspective of integrating Russian and EU interests in a mutually profitable manner. Pro-Russian rebels in Ukraine likely shot down the plane. Just as likely, it was an error. Downing a commercial aircraft only serves to strengthen rather than weaken international support of the central government. Rebels probably thought they were targeting a Ukrainian supply plane. Whatever the details, resolving the crisis must allow all involved to save face in some diplomatic manner.

The air route affected concerns transport between Europe and southeast Asia. The Dutch suffered the highest loss of life. This offers Europe a chance to take a leadership role in shaping a reasonable dynamic between Europe, Russia, and Ukraine. Prudent American politicians, in turn, need to turn their backs on inflaming anti-Russian hysteria

[By TNH Publisher-Editor Antonis Diamataris, on his recent trip to Greece]

What I Saw in Greece

I left behind a piece of my heart in every region of Greece that I visited in the past month.

Such is her natural beauty, the weather, the culture, the history.

But my heart also bled for what I saw and heard.

In short, the situation is even worse than it was last summer. People are on the edge of despair. The social safety net is on the verge of disintegration. The youth are leaving, especially the educated ones. After all, six years is a long time to be in a state of deep crisis, especially when there is no light of hope on the horizon to help the people endure.

I will convey to you the situation in our homeland as I experienced it and as it was described to me by dozens of my known and unknown interlocutors, from all social classes, but especially from the common folk.

I will convey the real situation. The hard truth.

That is our obligation to you, but also to ourselves.

On the contrary, the presentation of a frivolous and pretty picture of the situation would make me an accomplice, because I am now convinced that the hour is getting late.

In short, the country is in a "war" mode: the people are against the politicians, the many – the poor – against the few – the rich. And the state against all.

The links that are holding society together today are the accumulated resentment, defeatism, discouragement, and despair.

And that is not surprising when the unemployment rate is 26 percent, and when the standard of living declined by 25% during the past six years.

That is why the number of suicides are now counted in the thousands, and a portion of the population is now living a ghetto lifestyle.

FOOLISH ATTITUDES

Nevertheless, confirming the rule that it is difficult for people to change their habits in any period of time, even long-term unemployed Greeks refuse to become "Albanians," to work more hours for less pay.

The result is that the foreigners work – mainly the Albanians – and Greeks sit.

And the educated, the skilled, and ambitious, migrate – mainly to Germany. Over 7,000 doctors have immigrated to Germany thus far.

The situation cannot continue for too long like this.

The numbers do not look good and everyone knows that, regardless of what the government says. The country needs vision, ideas, and inspiration.

A change in policy is needed, starting with the reforms.

The troika cannot remain on hand forever to do the job that the Greeks should do.

The state of bankruptcy cannot continue. All major issues must be analyzed with bold realism. Even the sensitive issue of whether Greece can remain – not merely if it should – in the Eurozone.

In noting that "a part of the population has become ghettoized," I am referring to the Greek who stubbornly refuses to "become an Albanian" but instead remains unemployed for a long period of time unless he finds "employment" either in the public sector or on the same terms that prevailed before the crisis.

This is a major problem, and dealing with it is crucial for the country, but it is intractable.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, a historical "leveling" ideology has been embedded that made an all-too self-evident right that the state has the responsibility to take care of its citizens, no matter what.

The decreasing of the self-dependence of

the citizen and his accompanying dependence on the state has consequently increased the utility of the politician, who in exchange for the citizen's vote, turns him into spineless client.

On the other hand the state, a consumer of the resources of the people, is thought of as a producer of wealth, with predictable results.

The ideology of holding the individual responsible for his life – which is the basic way of life in here in the United States – and which promotes dignity and self-improvement, and as a result the minimal possible state interference in the lives of the citizens, has been demonized in Greece. It has only taken root in the Greek mind in times of necessity, that is, when people were suffering.

For example: The Greek immigrants who arrived on our shores with suitcase in hand, lacking knowledge of the language and the relevant qualifications for the job market, had to take responsibility for their lives from day one. And they went to work, and they prospered.

The ideology of the state-dependent citizen, the client, and the all-too powerful politician granting favors was promoted and presented as morally superior by Andreas Papandreou.

And so, during this period of crisis, when the State is unable to provide them with the comfort and security of a position in the government, or with generous pensions which was the reward for their "work," the average Greek prefers to sit in the streets of the neighborhood with coffee and a cigarette in hand and laments that he will not accept becoming an "Albanian."

Thus, despite an unemployment rate of 26 percent, jobs in the fields, hotels, and restaurants are taken by foreigners, mostly Albanians, who perform them worthily, with a smile and in good Greek.

This condition, however, leads to new possibilities, as we know: Albanians who are currently working and saving will tomorrow be those who will buy the properties and become the bosses.

And why not?

The fact is that the six long years of crisis have not changed the Greeks' way of thinking.

And this is a major and difficult problem to solve.

Perhaps it will be solved on its own, as a result of the all-too dire necessity.

Meanwhile, the leaders, politicians, intellectuals, and the media should tell the truth to the people: Greece will not return to its previous state anytime soon.

That hard work is directly linked to the way out of the crisis.

That there needs to be a seismic change in the conception of state-citizen relations.

That participation of two to three Diaspora Greeks in the government, and the Diaspora's right to vote, will help to change the mindset of the locals.

Then, finally, the vicious cycle that began with Andreas Papandreou will end.

GREEK EXCEPTIONALISM

On the other hand, when you visit Greece, you find a very noticeable discrepancy between the place and the state of affairs. There is the rare natural beauty, the weather, and the incomparable culture and history.

I will focus now on the positive elements, which fill the sails of the soul with fresh aromatic air and the mind with deep wonder, as vast as the deep blue Aegean Sea. You come to feel that frequent pilgrimages to homeland are not only priceless, but essential.

One example: We boarded a boat in a village in Crete along with 20 other passengers which took us to a distant (and incredibly beautiful) beach.

The young but experienced captain – let's call him Sifis – polite, and speaking good

English, turns on the motor and the boat slips away playfully, as if skimming upon oil, over the crystal clear sea, which is its long-time acquaintance.

Just before we reach our destination, Sifis asks for the fare – four euros per person.

We were the only Greeks. "Why not collect the fare when we entered the boat?" I ask him. "If someone does not pay you now, what will you do?"

"It's ok," he replied, surprised. "Let him not pay. What, should I do, as soon as someone sets foot on my boat I ask him for money?"

Find, if you can, this romantic beauty, subtlety of soul and hospitality elsewhere.

Another example: In the center of an Athens basin dead from the lack of building activity, at the site of the old racetrack at the Faliron Delta, a huge undertaking is underway, a miracle of vision, scale, and execution: The Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center.

Arriving there, you momentarily feel that you were suddenly, mysteriously transported to Manhattan, to a construction project spanning several blocks.

Bulldozers, cranes – 500 different types of equipment are in use.

About 1100 people are working there now!

Olive trees with thick trunks, decades old, about 1,200 trees in total and 320,000 shrubs will be planted, selected with great care from different parts of the country, the soil also well-chosen and arranged perfectly.

When the gates of the Cultural Center are opened, the visitor will think that these trees have been there forever.

Above all, what most impressed me is the feeling of perfection that prevails, as a philosophy and a way of working, that encompasses everything and everywhere.

The three components of the Cultural Center, The National Library of Greece, the Greek National Opera, and the Stavros Niarchos Park will not only rival the best of their kind, they will be better than the best of the best.

This colossal project, worth 566 million euros – the biggest project in Europe at the moment – could not have come at a better time. Beyond the valuable jobs it has offered to so many people – it is reminiscent of the construction of the Empire State Building during the depths of the Great Depression – it also has the potential to inspire the masses and the authorities to set new, high national goals that will lift the country up, high above the current misery and even make them an example for the rest of the world.

Final example: High atop a restaurant, I admire the unbelievable views of the illuminated Acropolis.

That God-sculpted rock upon which man, the Ancient Greeks, deposited the products of his highest self, logic, knowledge, and values.

This hill, and its environs, says all that can be said about man, his character, mind, consciousness, and art.

Since then, man has occasionally created more representations of his wisdom. They added to the Greek contributions.

There is no comparable view in the world. Nothing, no place can be compared with it. That's it. And it is in Athens.

The next time you get depressed about the situation in the country – as melancholy sometimes overcomes me – when you feel the powerful dissonance between what was, what is and what could have been for Greece, talk to Sifis, visit The Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, and drink some ouzo as you gaze upon the Acropolis on a perfect summer night.

You will feel like a new person. You will be filled with optimism and hope. And you will renew your faith – and your determination – for a better Greece.

AGORA – THE ORIGINAL MARKETPLACE OF IDEAS

cient Greeks did that in the Agora, the original marketplace of ideas, and we, their modern-day descendants, aspire to continue that tradition.

We respect one another's opinion very much, but often times we will disagree on particular issues. We would never fabricate a difference of opinion for the sake of writing an interesting column.

Rest assured, anything we write here are our sincere, heartfelt thoughts.

We will share them with you every two weeks. We hope you enjoy them, and we look forward to your taking part in the discussion as well – by contributing letters to the editor in response, and/or commenting on our website: www.thenationalherald.com

and allow us to behave like a mature and responsible Great Power rather than an insecure and pugnacious adolescent.

SCAROS RESPONDS

Dan, your argument would make perfect sense if we lived in a decent, rational world in which folks played by the rules and there was some semblance of order and mutual respect. If we had a true United Nations organization, instead of one that, that save for the noble and important purpose of helping indigenous populations, say, obtain clear drinking water, is a disgrace to its very name.

Diplomacy without teeth – make that, fangs – is not even worth the effort, and military misadventures usually lead to more trouble ahead.

I have written often in the recent past why going to war should be our last resort, but that a limited war is a disastrous oxymoron that only gets us into a deeper hold in the long run. I have also written why in this crazy world of ours we remain, if only by default, "the last best hope of earth," as Abraham Lincoln said, and so there is no moral equivalency here: yes, Ukraine may be to Russia what Canada or Mexico is to the United States, but we as a nation are morally superior to Russia,

period. And that gives us the right to live by a double standard.

On the other hand, Rand Paul's brand of "New Normalcy" does sound tempting, just as Warren G. Harding's original version did 94 years ago, when in one fell swoop America divorced Wilsonian globalism and elected Harding to the presidency by an astounding 60.3 percent of the popular vote. Even Ronald Reagan, who won 49 out of 50 states in 1984, didn't prevail by that high a popular vote percentage. The only problem with isolationism is, pardon the pun, when it is taken in isolation.

If we decide, once and for all, to mind our own business, then we really need to mean it. We cannot continue to meddle in world affairs so long as we do not commit troops to the cause. We need to bring home not only our soldiers, but also our diplomats and most of all, our checkbooks. Until a new and improved international organization emerges, let someone else pick up the tab for foreign aid.

And then comes the hard part: refocusing on Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). There are few partisan-motivated cheap shots that I consider more preposterous than the suggestion that President Obama was born in Kenya – and that his

birth certificate is not real. But one even worse than that, though, is a reference to Reagan's SDI as "Star Wars." That implies an aggressive, belligerent maneuver, rather than a means of security and protection. It would be as absurd as if you or I had state-of-the-art alarm systems installed in our homes and, as a result, others accused us of planning to burglarize some homes on the other side of town.

And then, there is step three: a bona fide moratorium on immigration until we can get our ducks in a row. A "Sorry, Filled to Capacity" sign hanging from the Statue of Liberty.

Because this is not 1920 and we can no longer afford the luxury of being isolationist unless we truly have "two oceans protecting us," as we did back then. That means rendering potential nuclear missiles headed our way obsolete, and pouring some quick-hardening cement to fill the holes of our porous immigration system.

If we can make all of that happen, Dan, then I'm all for fencing in our American backyard, tending to our cookouts, baseball games, and Fourth of July celebrations, and leaving the rest of the kooky world to its own devices.

WHAT'S YOUR OPINION?