

AHI VISIT TO HNDGS – 5th JULY 2021

AHI 13th COLLEGE STUDENT TRIP

GENERAL KONSTANTINOS FLOROS

Opening Remarks

Mr. Larigkakis - Dear Nick,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Κυρίες και κύριοι,
Αγαπητοί σπουδαστές,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you in Greece, and the Hellenic National Defence General Staff. Last year, the annual trip organized by the American Hellenic Institute was canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nevertheless, we managed to keep in touch thanks to the AHI webinars and discussion events. Video conference technology works, but it will never replace physical contact.

So, we are very happy to have you with us again, now that many of the COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted.

To begin with, I would like to thank again my dear friend Nick for his tireless efforts in promoting the Greek values and the US-Greece relations. He has been doing an excellent job for decades and I believe he sets an example for all Greek-Americans to follow.

Ladies and gentlemen, κυρίες και κύριοι,

The East Mediterranean is a region of intense power play competition and probably one of the most sensitive and challenging areas of the globe. The threats and challenges emanating from the region are too many. Just to name a few, we are confronted with hybrid threats, acts of terrorism, violent extremism, energy insecurity, smuggling, climate change, economic crises, and trans-border organized criminal activities.

On top of these, we experience irregular migration and refugee flows, in a density that poses a significant challenge for the whole region. Furthermore, the conflicts in Syria and Libya, along with the economic situation in Lebanon, threaten peace and stability in the region.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you can easily understand, the challenges we face are many and complex. On top of these challenges, Greece is forced to deal with Turkey, as the common denominator in all crises in our periphery.

And this happens because of her revisionist agenda and militarized foreign policy, aiming to change the status quo in the Aegean and the East Mediterranean, in order to elevate itself to a regional power, or even to the level of a superpower.

Equally worrisome is Turkey's strong opposition against several regional actors, such as Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, who cooperate with Greece and Cyprus for the promotion of peace and stability in the region. We need to keep in mind that Ankara's behavior is not a problem only for Greece or Cyprus. It is a problem for the whole region and beyond.

Contrary to Turkey's use of coercion, threats, intimidation, aggressive rhetoric, and military activity that destabilize the whole region, Greece as a pillar of stability and a steadfast security provider, responds in full respect of the international law, being sober and with self-restraint, but also with determination. As a significant actor in the East Mediterranean and the Balkans, we establish new productive relations on a bilateral and multilateral level and further enhance long-standing ones, beyond the Alliance and the European Union.

Greece and the Hellenic Armed Forces maintain excellent relations with almost all countries in the region and are widely accepted and highly appreciated. This is because Greece follows an active defence diplomacy without ulterior motive. We claim nothing that it doesn't belong to us, and we are constantly working to promote the consolidation of peace and stability in our periphery, on the basis of International Law and good neighborly relations.

Now, let me say a few words about the US - Greek strategic relationship, and specifically about our bilateral cooperation on defence. Greece and the United States have a deep-rooted friendship because they share common values, and the principles of freedom, democracy, human rights and respect for International Law.

Furthermore, we should never forget that Greece and the United States have always been on the same side of history. Therefore, it is only natural to cooperate closely, especially on defence. So, it pleases me greatly to state that our bilateral cooperation is at an all-time high and growing at all levels both in terms of quantity and quality.

During the past year especially, our interaction has seen a huge increase at every level. I want to emphasize though, that we have not reached the limit of our cooperation. On the contrary, we have only created the momentum to elevate our partnership to the next level.

The willingness to do more together is clear. And in this regard, we are discussing to upgrade our interaction through a mutually beneficially amendment of the Mutual Defence Cooperation Agreement.

Ladies and gentlemen, κυρίες και κύριοι,

I will now hand the floor to Rear Admiral Leloudas for the presentation.

Thank you for your attention.

Closing Remarks

Ladies and gentlemen,

I believe you have now developed a better understanding of the situation that we are coping with. You have also gained knowledge about the constructive role Greece and the Hellenic Armed Forces play in the region, as a stability factor and a security provider.

As you saw, Greece has developed a network of alliances and partnerships, aiming to safeguard peace and stability. Besides our regional partners, we attach great importance to our strategic partnership with the United States.

The US-Greece defence cooperation is our top priority with the aim to meet common security challenges and threats, but also to promote stability in our region.

I want you to know that when the United States support Greece, they support a credible ally, with capable Armed Forces. They support an ally who respects its obligations and honors its commitments.

In this regard, I strongly believe it is in the best interest of the United States to strengthen Greece's ability to support US interests and safeguard our common values. This is where all of you as Greek-Americans and the American Hellenic Institute can provide your best support.

And I know you do it. We need you to continue to be proud ambassadors of Greece in the United States and advocates of Greece's interests.

Closing my remarks, I would like to remind you that 2021 is a very special year for Greece. It marks the bicentennial anniversary since the outbreak of the Greek Revolution of 1821 and the War of Independence, which resulted in the establishment of Greece as an independent state.

The Greek Revolution of 1821 is undoubtedly the most significant point in the recent history of Greece. It is the beacon that guides all Greeks and especially us in the military. I want you to know that the sacrifices of our forefathers for our freedom are the contract in which we all have signed our names. Therefore, rest assured we will never allow our sovereignty and sovereign rights to be violated.

Ladies and gentlemen, κυρίες και κύριοι, thank you for being here today.

I wish you a great summer and every success in your endeavors in life. But whatever you do, please make sure you never lose your close connection with Greece and our common heritage.

Dear Nick, once again, thank you for being such a great supporter.

Σας ευχαριστώ.