



# HELLENIC LINK–MIDWEST Newsletter

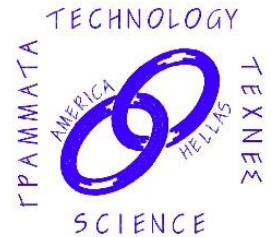
A CULTURAL AND SCIENTIFIC LINK WITH GREECE

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## Upcoming Events

### "Best Ever"? The State of the U.S.-Greece Bilateral Relationship

On Sunday, February 25, 2024, at 3:00 pm, Hellenic Link–Midwest will present Endy Zemenides, Executive Director of the Hellenic American Leadership Council, in a live lecture titled: *"Best Ever"? The State of the U.S.-Greece Bilateral Relationship*. The event will take place at the lecture hall of the Holy Taxiarchai and Saint Haralambos Greek Orthodox Church, 7373 N Caldwell Ave, Niles, Illinois.

On the heels of the latest round in the U.S.-Greece Strategic Dialogue on February 9 and the sale of F35s to Greece, the celebration of the U.S.-Greece relationship as "the best it has ever been" is certain to only grow louder. This leads to several questions: Is really the relationship at the best it has ever been? What challenges in the relationship still remain to be overcome? How does this relationship affect the Greco-Turkish relationship? Can we say "best ever" as long as Cyprus remains occupied?

We will be discussing all these questions and more with Endy Zemenides, Executive Director of the Hellenic American Leadership Council. This will be Endy's first public lecture since convening the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Southeast Europe and Eastern Mediterranean Forum (co-hosted by HALC, Kathimerini and the Delphi Economic Forum) on February 12-13 following the Strategic Dialogue in Washington.

*Endy Zemenides* is the Executive Director of the Hellenic American Leadership Council (HALC), a national Greek-American advocacy organization. He oversees staff and fellows in Chicago, New York and Washington, D.C., and leads the organizations advocacy efforts at the federal, state and local levels, as well as HALC's public education programs. Zemenides is in the Leadership Circles of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs (CCGA), where he also was one of the CCGA's Emerging Leaders Fellows.

He served as Senior Advisor to former Illinois State Treasurer and Democratic nominee for the United States Senate, Alexi Giannoulias; has served on the editorial board and board of advisors of the National Strategy Forum, as a participant in the Aspen Institute's Socrates Program, and has lectured in international relations and American foreign policy in DePaul University's political science department.

He received a BA from DePaul University, an MA from the

University of Essex (UK), and his JD from the Georgetown University Law Center, where he served as a fellow for the Harrison Institute for Public Law and an Editor of the Georgetown Journal of International Law.

### The Promotion in the West of the Greek Struggle for Independence, 1821-1827

On Sunday, March 17, 2024, at 2:00 pm, Hellenic Link–Midwest will present Dr. Nikos Nicoloudis, in an online lecture in celebration of the Greek Independence Day, titled *"The Promotion in the West of the Greek Struggle for Independence, 1821-1827"*. Information on how to join the lecture will be provided separately by email and regular mail, and on the website of Hellenic Link–Midwest.

The Greek Revolution started at a most unfavorable period: barely six years after the end of the Napoleonic wars whose outcome had led to the restoration of European monarchs overthrown by the French Revolution and Napoleon, putting an end to the spreading of democratic ideas that had prevailed until then. Therefore, it was no surprise that the outbreak of the Greek Revolution in the Danubian Principalities in February 1821 was labeled as another attempt to replace an old monarchy with a republic. This propaganda was voiced in the Austrian Press in May-June of that year under the guidance of Chancellor Metternich, mastermind of the Holy Alliance and the restoration of the old order in Europe.

This presentation will discuss the successful defense and promotion of the Greek cause undertaken by Greeks living abroad and their foreign associates who had access to "receptive ears". Such were the cases of the famous classical scholar Adamantios Koraes; Petros Ipitis, a member of the Philiki Hetaireia and a follower of Alexandros Hypsilantis; and Alexandros Mavrokordatos who, along with their Greek associates in various Western European countries, succeeded to a significant extent in changing the outlook of international public opinion towards the Greek struggle. As evidence to this serve favorable articles in newspapers of the time, followed by pro-Greek pamphlets; literary works; financial and military aid. A new surge of philhellenic publications followed in 1826, after the fall of Mesolongi, contributing to the pro-Greek stand of the Great Powers during the Battle of Navarino (1827).

*Nicholas Nikoloudis* received his Doctoral degree at the Department (currently Center) of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, at King's College, London. Subsequently taught history courses at the CYA (College Year in Athens), the Athens School for Tourist Guides and the YWCA, as well

at postgraduate seminars at Athens Institute for Education and Research. His areas of research interest include, geographically, Greece (medieval and modern), Southeastern Europe, the Middle East and the Mediterranean, and thematically, military and sociopolitical history. He has served as Editor-in-Chief of *Historica Themata (Historical Themes)*, has co-authored two textbooks for the Hellenic Open University, and has published thirteen books and many articles.

## ***In Brief***

### **Greece Faces a Very Serious Demographic Problem**

Since quite some time Greece faces a very serious demographic problem. According to UN Data, in Greece, in 1950, the birth rate per one thousand people stood at 19.669, and grew slowly to reach 20.555 in 1958. Since then, it has declined continuously to reach 6.870 in 2024, a decline down to one third of that in 1958.

According to a recent article in the Greek newspaper *ekathimerini*, “*This is an existential threat, unless Greece manages to attract enough immigrants to be a viable state. Or unless it is absorbed by a larger entity, such as a federal European Union.*”

Since 2012, the Greek tax code provided to taxpayers with dependent children a 2,000 euro deduction for each of the first two children, and a 3,000 euro deduction for the third and each additional child. Obviously, as the data shows this has not made a dent on the decline of birth rates.

In January 2024, the Greek government recognizing “the demographic issue is a basic priority,” announced increased tax allowances: 2,400 euros for the first child, 2,700 euros for the second child, 3,000 euros for the third child, and 3,500 euros for families with more than four children. According to *ekathimerini*, in 2024 the Greek government will also implement additional measures including a €1,000 increase of the tax-free allowance for families with children, an increase of the maternity allowance for freelancers and farmers from four to nine months to the level of the minimum salary, increased heating allowance income limits from €3,000 to €5,000 per child, and the introduction of a social electricity tariff for families with four or more children.

These measures support annually about 35,000 one-child families, 32,000 families with two children, 6,600 families with three and 1,400 families with four or more children.

Obviously, the recovery of the country from the deep economic crisis that started in late 2009, does not allow drastic economic measures to turn the demographic crisis around.

### **Tax Returns in Greece**

According to a measure that the Greek Finance Ministry plans to submit for approval to the parliament in the very near future (source Greek Newspaper *ekathimerini*), about 1 million employees and pensioners would not need to bother

to submit a tax return. These taxpayers have incomes exclusively from salaries, pensions, and interest on deposits, and expenses from cars, and real estate. The tax office has the data on these sources of income and expenses, and will automatically generate the tax return. On June 30<sup>th</sup>, when the return is due, the tax office will send to the tax payer a tax settlement note.

### **Charles Antetokounmpo Family Foundation**

Last summer, Milwaukee Bucks player Yiannis Antetokounmpo and his family launched the charitable non-profit organization, the Charles Antetokounmpo Family Foundation (CAFF) (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*). CAFF is a multi-cause, multi-country philanthropic group with the mission of supporting a wide array of needs and causes.

Already, the Antetokounbros Basketball Academy offers high quality basketball training to 100 kids from low income families— 50 boys, 50 girls—in Athens, Greece. CAFF has also launched in partnership with the American College of Greece a five-year program, seeking to expand the educational curriculum of the Antetokounbros Academy. In addition, this partnership will provide 24 college scholarships for under-resourced young people and refugees aiming to give them opportunities for higher education. In a joint statement, brothers Giannis, Kostas, Thanasis, Alex and Francis Antetokounmpo said: “*We created CAFF to honor our father Charles, who taught us that each of us has a responsibility to help others achieve their dreams. Our journey is proof that investing in others can unlock the potential inside every person – no matter where they start or what difficulties they face. It is our vision to unlock and fuel opportunities to allow everyone to reach their full potential. We believe deeply in the power of good mentorship, education and sport and are committed to offering opportunities to young people so they can thrive personally, academically and professionally.*” (Source *ekathimerini*)

## ***From Our History***

### **Excerpts from the monumental work of the Byzantine historian, Speros Vryonis:**

#### ***“The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century”***

#### ***POLITICAL AND MILITARY COLLAPSE***

#### ***Events Leading to Manzikert – Byzantine Internal Developments (1025–71)***

*(Continuation from the previous issue)*

Of considerable importance in the decline of the indigenous armies as well as in the socioeconomic difficulties of the state, were the growth and expansion of the landed aristocracy and the corresponding decline of the free peasant and the free landholding soldier. Though it has been customary to assign primary importance to this phenomenon in Byzantine decline, it would seem that in terms of the eleventh century and the Turkish invasions, the struggle between bureaucrats and generals was more important in the

dissolution of the thematic levies. It is true, however, that this other process had been at work for a long time and entailed the weakening of peasant soldiery and of state finances. The existence of the free peasant community had been of crucial economic, military, and social importance to the state in the period of its greatness. This free village community was the basic tax source for the support of the thematic armies. Finally, the existence of these free rural communities, which paid the taxes and performed military service, provided for a healthy social structure and a balance against the provincial aristocrats. This social structure was threatened and altered by the decline of the free peasantry which occurred when, for one reason or another, the peasant abandoned his land or his title to it. The crucial cause of this decline was the appearance of the powerful landowner (both ecclesiastical and lay) in the communities during the tenth and eleventh centuries. The peasants sold or gave their land to the magnates, sometimes willingly in order to escape burdens imposed by taxation, inclement weather, famine; at other times unwillingly, having been the victims of coercion by the powerful. Though the emperors realized that the diminution of the free peasant community would have disastrous results on financial and military affairs and legislated accordingly, nevertheless they were in the end unable to halt the process. The strenuous efforts of the tenth-century rulers had a certain staying effect, but with the death of Basil II and the appearance of lesser men on the throne, this effect gradually died out. The free peasantry, though it continued to exist, had been significantly weakened, and henceforth the numbers of paroicoi (serfs) of the state, church, and magnates increased greatly, while the numbers of the free peasantry declined. The increase of the paroicoi was accompanied by the increase of state-granted exemptions, such as excuseia and pronoia, on behalf of the magnates. Thus, the free peasantry declined in a process that did not provide the state with any sufficient recompense for its loss of revenues and soldiery. Simultaneously, the magnates became more powerful and thus a greater menace to central authority. Byzantium was in the process of an evolution that, for want of a better word, must be described as "feudalization."

The economic decline and especially its causes are not sufficiently documented, yet the coinage of this period reflects with grim accuracy the hard times that had beset the Byzantines. Beginning with the reign of Michael IV (1034–41) and continuing until the reign of Alexius I (1081–1118) the solidus underwent a radical debasement that destroyed the purity of the "dollar of the Middle Ages." Among those developments that had the most serious economic repercussions was the above-mentioned social evolution that weakened the free peasant community and strengthened the landowning class. The former was the basis of the tax system, and the latter received vast exemptions from taxes, thus this social phenomenon brought dire economic consequences to state finance. The effect on finance by the time of Isaac Comnenus had become very serious.

There has been some discussion as to the failure of the Byzantines to develop a trading class and a commercial spirit such as developed in Italy. The proponents of this theory maintain that this oversight on the part of Byzantines was a

basic cause in its collapse and in the triumph of Venice. But if one examines the question, he will see that perhaps this supposed shortcoming has been exaggerated and that it was not responsible for the collapse of the state first before the Turks and then before Venice. In fact, what little source material is at hand testifies that maritime and land commerce both on a local and international scale, as well as a merchant-artisan class, played a prominent role in Byzantine economic life, and regardless of whether the commerce was carried by Greek or foreign merchants, the state collected large sums in taxes from both. There is no indication that this trade had halted in the eleventh century except insofar as disorders in the provinces might have interfered. That this supposed lack of a developed merchant class and spirit did not substantially contribute to the economic decline in the eleventh century is apparent from the state of finances at the end of Basil's reign in 1025. The fiscal state of the Empire was in such excellent shape that the emperor left the taxes of the poor uncollected for the last two years of his reign. Any government that can afford to leave taxes uncollected for a period of two years is in better than average condition. That Venice did triumph over the Byzantines is clearly illustrated by the series of treaties and events between the two states beginning with the reign of Alexius I and ending in the Fourth Crusade. But the reasons for this economic triumph are not that the inhabitants of the lagoons developed a commercial mentality whereas the coastal inhabitants of the empire did not, rather it was political events that contributed so greatly to the economic fortunes of Venice and destroyed those of Byzantium. The appearance of the Normans in Italy, the decline of the Byzantine naval and land forces, and the specter of political disaster hanging over the empire in 1082 were the determining factors that induced Alexius I to accord the first of that fateful series of chrysobulls to the Italian cities. It was the stipulations of these treaties which made Venetian fortunes, because henceforth Byzantine merchants suffered a tax discrimination to the advantage of their Venetian competitors. Venetian merchants, in fact, enjoyed the benefits of a "protective tariff," that is, they were exempt from paying the 10 percent ad valorem tax on the goods they carried, whereas the Greeks were forced to continue paying it. As a result, the Venetians could and did acquire almost a monopoly of the carrying trade, for they could pay more for the goods and then sell them cheaper than the Byzantine merchants. Once they acquired superiority in the carrying trade, the 10 percent ad valorem tax on all those cargoes escaped forever the coffers of the imperial treasury in Constantinople. The commercial victory of the Venetians was not due to their superior commercial spirit and to the Byzantine congenital defect in the same, but rather to that confluence of political circumstances which forced the empire to purchase the aid of the Venetian fleet at a dear price. The superiority of the Venetians lay primarily in their privileged and tax-free position in contrast to the position of their Byzantine competitors. Even so, Italian commercial supremacy and its consequences occurred after the battle of Manzikert, and so contributed neither to the socio-economic nor to the political decline that led to Manzikert.

*(To be continued)*

# *From the Riches of Our Cultural Heritage*

## **Poetry by Odysseas Elytis**

### **From *Axion Esti***

#### **Η Γένεσις**

ΣΤΗΝ ΑΡΧΗ το φως Και η ώρα η πρώτη  
που τα χείλη ακόμη στον πηλό  
δοκιμάζουν τα πράγματα του κόσμου  
Αίμα πράσινο και βολβοί στη γη χρυσοί  
Πανωραία στον ύπνο της άπλωσε και η θάλασσα  
γάζες αιθέρος τις αλεύκαντες  
κάτω απ' τις χαρουπιές και τους μεγάλους όρθιους φοίνικες  
Εκεί μόνος αντίκρισα  
τον κόσμο  
κλαίγοντας γοερά  
Η ψυχή μου ζητούσε Σηματωρό και Κήρυκα  
Είδα τότε θυμάμαι  
τις τρεις Μαύρες Γυναίκες  
να σηκώνουν τα χέρια κατά την Ανατολή  
Χρυσωμένη τη ράχη τους και το νέφος που άφηναν  
λίγο λίγο σβήνοντας  
δεξιά Και φυτά σχημάτων άλλων  
Ήταν ο ήλιος με τον άξονά του μέσα μου  
πολυάχτιδος όλος που καλούσε Και  
αυτός αλήθεια που ήμουνα Ο πολλούς αιώνες πριν  
Ο ακόμη χλωρός μες στη φωτιά Ο άκοπος απ' τον ουρανό  
Ένωσα ήρθε κι έσκυψε  
πάνω απ' το λίκνο μου  
ίδια η μνήμη γινάμενη παρόν  
τη φωνή πήρε των δέντρων, των κυμάτων:  
«Έντολή σου» είπε «αυτός ο κόσμος  
και γραμμένος μες στα σπλάχνα σου είναι  
Διάβασε και προσπάθησε  
και πολέμησε» είπε  
«Ο καθείς και τα όπλα του» είπε  
Και τα χέρια του άπλωσε όπως κάνει  
νέος δόκιμος Θεός για να πλάσει μαζί αλγηδόνα κι  
ευφροσύνη.  
Πρώτα σύρθηκαν με δύναμη  
και ψηλά πάνω από τα μπεντένια ξεκαρφώθηκαν πέφτοντας  
οι Εφτά Μπαλτάδες  
καταπώς η Καταιγίδα  
στο σημείο μηδέν όπου ευωδιάζει  
απαρχής πάλι ένα πουλί  
καθαρό παλιννοστόυσε το αίμα  
και τα τέρατα έπαιρναν την όψη ανθρώπου  
Τόσο εύλογο το Ακατανόητο  
Ύστερα και οι άνεμοι όλοι της φαμίλιας μου έφτασαν  
τ' αγόρια με τα φουσκωμένα μάγουλα  
και τις πράσινες πλατιές ουρές όμοια Γοργόνες  
και άλλοι γέροντες γνώριμοι παλαιοί  
οστρακόδερμοι γενειοφόροι  
Και το νέφος εχώρισαν στα δύο Και αυτό πάλι στα τέσσερα  
και το λίγο που απόμεινε φύσηξαν και ξαπόστειλαν στο  
Βορρά

Με πλατύ πάτησε πόδι στα νερά και αγέρωχος ο μέγας  
Κούλες

Η γραμμή του ορίζοντα έλαμψε  
ορατή και πυκνή και αδιαπέραστη

ΑΥΤΟΣ ο πρώτος ύμνος.

ΚΑΙ ΑΥΤΟΣ αλήθεια που ήμουνα Ο πολλούς αιώνες πριν  
Ο ακόμη χλωρός μες στη φωτιά Ο Αχειροποίητος  
με το δάχτυλο έσυρε τις μακρινές  
γραμμές

ανεβαίνοντας κάποτε ψηλά με οξύτητα  
και φορές πιο χαμηλά οι καμπύλες απαλές  
μία μέσα στην άλλη

στεριές μεγάλες που ένιωσα  
να μυρίζουνε χώμα όπως η νόηση

Τόσο ήταν αλήθεια  
που πιστά μ' ακολούθησε το χώμα  
έγινε σε μεριές κρυφές πιο κόκκινο  
και άλλου με πολλές μικρές πευκοβελόνες

Ύστερα πιο νωχελικά

οι λόφοι οι κατωφέρειες  
άλλοτε και το χέρι αργό σε ανάπαυση  
τα λαγκάδια οι κάμποι

κι άξαφνα πάλι βράχοι άγριοι και γυμνοί  
δυνατές πολύ παρορμήσεις  
Μια στιγμή που εστάθηκε να στοχαστεί  
κάτι δύσκολο ή κάτι το υψηλό:

ο Όλυμπος, ο Ταΰγετος  
«Κάτι που να σου σταθεί βοηθός  
και αφού πεθάνεις» είπε

Και στις πέτρες μέσα τράβηξε κλωστές  
κι απ' τα σπλάχνα της γης ανέβασε σχιστόλιθο  
ένα γύρο σ' όλη την πλαγιά τα πλατιά στερέωσε  
σκαλοπάτια

Εκεί μόνος απίθωσε  
κρήνες λευκές μαρμάρινες  
μύλους ανέμων

τρούλους ρόδινους μικρούς  
και ψηλούς διάτρητους περιστεριώνες

Αρετή με τις τέσσερις ορθές γωνίες  
Κι επειδή συλλογίστηκεν

ωραία που είναι στην αγκαλιά ο ένας του άλλου  
γέμισαν έρωτα οι μεγάλες γούρνες  
αγαθά σκύψανε τα ζώα μοσκάρια και αγελάδες  
σαν να μην ήτανε στον κόσμο πειρασμός κανένας

και να μην είχαν γίνει ακόμη τα μαχαίρια  
«Η ειρήνη θέλει δύναμη να την αντέξεις» είπε  
και στροφή γύρω του κάνοντας μ' ανοιχτές παλάμες  
έσπειρε

φλόμους κρόκους καμπανούλες  
όλων των ειδών της γης τ' αστέρια  
τροπημένα στο ένα φύλλο τους για σημείο καταγωγής  
και υπεροχή και δύναμη