

AHIF Annual Student Trip to Greece and Cyprus Illumines and Inspires

By Constantine S. Sirigos

ATHENS – The attendance of many of the top military leaders of Greece at the farewell dinner of the annual American Hellenic Institute Foundation (AHIF) College Student Foreign Policy Trip was a tribute both to the character, achievements, and promise of the ten students and also to the appreciation of the officers for the importance to Greece of strong bonds with the Hellenic Diaspora and organizations like AHI.

AHI's President Nicholas Larigakis welcomed the guests, lauded the students, and thanked the Hellenic Armed forces for hosting extraordinary trips to places like the main Greek Naval base on Salamis and the vital U.S. facilities at Souda Bay in Crete.

He also thanked officials in Nicosia for the trip to Cyprus which all described as mind opening and several described as life-changing.

After also acknowledging AHI Athens's President George Economou and its Vice President retired Rear Admiral Vasileios Kyriazis, as well as AHI staff in Athens and Washington, DC, Larigakis warmly thanked the donors— the annual cost is around \$60,000 – who made the trip possible, an endeavor which is so important for keeping the



The mutual admiration between the U.S. students and Greece's top military officers was moving – and both groups expressed their appreciation to the organizers of the annual AHIF College Student Foreign Policy Trip.

community and the U.S. officials they will come in contact with throughout their lives well informed. Truly they will be exemplary ambassadors for Greece and Cyprus, which is Larigakis' vision.

The trip began with briefings by U.S. officials in Washington, DC and corresponding meetings in Nicosia and Athens. The value of the trip is best described by the students themselves.

Apostolos Siopsis of Knoxville, TN studies economics

at GWU, said, "We have experienced a Greece few people, even Greeks see. I have seen the political life...and the impressive militaries and diplomatic corps of Greece and Cyprus first hand."

Several of the students highlighted learning about the importance of the new bilateral and trilateral arrangements established by the two countries, and their carefully cultivated and growing geopolitical importance. They all praised their fellow students and expressed their appre-

ciation to Larigakis for his leadership and initiatives.

Alexandra Choate, studying at Queens University, Charlotte, SC, and a descendant of Asia Minor refugees, relived her ancestors' pain when she visited Turkish-occupied Cyprus.

John Tsaousis was asked, "Why are you on this trip if you are studying civil engineering at George Mason?" He replied that "I went to Greek school but they didn't teach us anything and I wanted to be more informed

about Greece and Cyprus. I am Greek Cypriot and what hit home was visiting my family's home in occupied Cyprus...My love for Greece has skyrocketed...and I am excited to see what its future holds. To Larigakis he said, "Your love for this country is admirable and it makes people around you want to make a difference."

George P. Limperis from Chicago said, "until we witnessed ourselves the crimes of Turkey on Cyprus," he thought what he heard was exaggerated. The desecrated churches and cemeteries shook him up and put current Turkish provocations into perspective.

Sophia Yphantides from San Diego is studying at Georgetown University. She said participating in this trip "has made me take even greater pride in where I come from and helping to realize how great a role Greece plays on the international stage...our trip to Souda Bay impressed upon me the kind of exemplary ally Greece has shown itself to be."

Konstantinos Tsarouchis from Philadelphia learned the importance of Greece to a unified Europe and a stable Balkans region. "This trip has caused me to reconsider my life plans" and to

include moving to Europe to advocate for Western interests, Greece and Cyprus."

Vasili Ioannidis from Bay City, Michigan, had only visited Greece twice. "The romanticized image I had of Greece did not reflect the deeper reality... through this trip...I have a new understanding of the foreign policy issues," and the broader Greek reality. He concluded by saying, "I know we created bonds that will last far beyond this trip."

The guests were first shaken up, then blown away when NYU student Basiliki Speros greeted them in fluent Chinese – just one indication of the high caliber of this year's students. "I decided to take this trip to better understand Greece" and Cyprus – "and its challenges" and to appreciate their strengths. "What country other than Greece could go through the biggest economic recession in recent memory and come out the other side as a pillar of military stability and regional strength...What country other than Cyprus could move past an invasion to eventually becoming a powerful regional negotiating force."

Demosthenes Theofanopoulos grew up in Queens, NY and studied Classical and Christian Civilization at Williams University. He was very impressed to learn "multilateral cooperation between Greece, Cyprus and virtually all neighboring countries have put them squarely in the epicenter of Mediterranean" affairs.

"I am from both Columbus, Ohio and Corfu, Greece and I just graduated from Ohio State University," declared Emily Pandis. While living in both countries exposed her to both the best and darkest realities of life in Greece, "its role on the global playing field was off my radar...my perspective of Greece has been transformed" by the AHIF trip. The experience also taught her about the power she has as an individual, and her constitutional duty and privilege to communicate with Congress about Greece and Cyprus.

Nicos Nicolaides Opens this Year's Greek Nights

By Christodoulos Athanasatos

ASTORIA – Greek Nights have returned to Athens Square Park in Astoria for the summer. Tuesday nights will once again feature the much-anticipated program of Greek music and dancing, organized by the Athens Square Committee, through September 24.

The virtuoso of the bouzouki and well-known social worker, Nicos Nicolaides, and the Cosmopolitan orchestra, along

