

## **UKRAINE–GREECE COOPERATION: IMBUED WITH COMMON HISTORY AND VISION**

– Let me start with an opening statement. Greece upholds the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of Ukraine, not recognizing the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula by the Russian Federation. International law, including various treaties, constitutes a fundamental guiding principle for the Hellenic Republic, and this does also apply in the case of Ukraine.

Our ties to the Ukrainian lands are both ancient and modern; Tyras and Olvia were prosperous cities on the estuary of the Dnister and Dnipro Rivers respectively built by the Greeks as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Mariupol, on the other hand, was founded in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century by the Greeks getting out of Crimea (Tavryda) to the northern shore of the Azov Sea.

A few years after Mariupol, Odessa was built, a city of symbolic significance for modern Greece; in Odessa, in 1814, Filiki Eteria was founded, the secret society which masterminded and set in motion the Greek independence struggle.

– *Ukraine hosts a considerable Greek expatriate community. Is there a proper liaison with representatives of the community and is the Embassy following the living conditions of the Greeks?*

– First of all, we follow closely the fortunes of the Greek community which is concentrated in the hinterland of Mariupol. They are part and parcel of the society in these areas.

We are also content with their treatment by the Ukrainian authorities, including on oblast and city level. The more these people feel unobstructed in their daily lives, living in the zone of conflict, the deeper grows their allegiance to their country, Ukraine.

Greece operates two Consulates General on the territory of Ukraine, in Odessa and Mariupol. This fact speaks for itself with regard to the care coming from Athens with a view to engaging and interacting with our expatriate community in Ukraine. To be exact, the Mariupol Greeks are an indigenous rather than diasporic element, as they hail directly from the ancient and medieval inhabitants of Tavryda (Crimea).

It is also a happy development that Greek presence in the Rada continues; Mr Lubinets, for example, an independent deputy from Donetsk and Chairman of the Committee on Minority and Human Rights is a distinguished member of our community.



*Георгіос Пукаміссас, Надзвичайний і Повноважний Посол Грецької Республіки в Україні з дружиною  
Georgios Poukamissas, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Hellenic Republic to Ukraine  
with his wife*

*– One more important sphere of cooperation between our countries is economy: Greek News Agenda mentions that the Hellenic Republic ranks 7<sup>th</sup> globally in terms of renewable energy production. A substantial part of the energy sector of Greece is constituted by solar power plants. In your opinion, what are the prospects of cooperation between Ukraine and Greece in this domain, given the sharp surge in the growth of solar power in the south of Ukraine and investments of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in Ukrainian renewable energy?*

*– Greek–Ukrainian economic cooperation could show more impetus. We cannot be satisfied with the current volume of bilateral trade, not exceeding 500 million euros per annum. More should be done. We are working hard for the convocation of the next session of the Joint Committee for Economic and Technological Cooperation at a ministerial level. Yet, we should not forget that cooperation in the maritime field is widespread and flourishing. Several thousands of Ukrainian sailors are at every moment employed in the Greek-owned merchant fleet.*

*– Tourism is considered to be one of the strong suits of the economy of the Hellenic Republic. According to the Ekathimerini journal, in 2018, as many as 33 million tourists visited Greece which is thrice as much as the country's population. What instruments and principles were employed by Greek business people and the government for such prosperous tourism? Given the untapped tourist potential of Ukraine, can we count on closer cooperation and exchange of expertise with the Greek National Tourist Organization?*

– You ask my view on how to promote Ukrainian tourism; the short answer is to achieve peace among yourselves and try to find a path of understanding with your neighbors, all around.

Ukraine must remain faithful to its history and culture; as a Greek, I see your cultural center of gravity to be in the line from Kyiv down to Zaporizhzhia. You are heavily imbued by Orthodoxy. Be yourselves.

The Embassy has been trying to promote the idea for a renaissance of Byzantine studies in Ukraine. Here, where one of the famous Christian medieval monuments is located, Saint Sophia's Cathedral of Kyiv, byzantine studies should get off the ground.

– *Your Excellency, how would you gauge your activities for the last three years and what is the greatest achievement of the mission?*

– During my almost 3 years of service in Ukraine, I have toiled to see that Ukrainians arrive at a better understanding of their interests in the European chessboard. Some progress in this direction has of late been registered. A lot remains to be done, in the area of reforms and beyond, but I feel we start moving in the right direction.

– *The political life in both Ukraine and the Hellenic Republic is extremely eventful. Recently, Prokopis Pavlopoulos, president of your country, has announced the dissolution of the parliament and early elections. As you will know, Ukraine now faces the same circumstances. From your standpoint, will Ukrainian-Greek relations undergo any changes as a result of political transitions?*

– I am proud of Ukraine's democratic achievements. Successive elections in 2019 have demonstrated that democracy, the spirit of Europe, is growing stronger and stronger. I consider myself privileged to have lived through these vicissitudes in Ukrainian life, which turn to the better, to have made my due contribution to see relations of Ukraine with the EU, of Ukraine and Greece, based on a better footing.

– *Your Excellency, you have been serving as head of the mission in Ukraine since 2016. As is known, before that you worked in Libya, Romania, the US and Cyprus. Could you please describe your impressions from our country? What has impressed you the most during this time? What places in Ukraine are your favorite, if any?*

– Going to Athens, I will miss Kyiv, a jewel of history and architecture. I will miss the beauty of many Ukrainian towns, the gentleness of the people, but, believe me, I will also keep fond memories of the Ukrainian plains and expanses, this endless white sea during winter time.

– *Mr Ambassador, thank you very much for today's interview. I entertain the hope that you enjoyed it as much as we did. Let me also express our gratitude for these three years of fruitful cooperation and for your unswerving patriotism and diligent adherence to democracy and the rule of law. May success attend you!*