



UNIVERSITY OF THE AEGEAN
 Department of Shipping, Trade & Transport
 Laboratory of GIS, Geo-economy & Geopolitics (GEOPOL)
<https://www.stt.aegean.gr/geopolab/GEOPOL%20PROFILE.htm>
 Contact person: John Karkazis (jkarkazis@aegean.gr)



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Editor: John Karkazis

UKRAINE AND THE GREEKS

Dr. George Poukamisas^{*1}
 Ambassador ad honorem

*1: Dr. Poukamisas is the chairman of Stravonas Society (<https://stravonas.gr/index.html>), vice-president of the Institute of Middle East Studies "al Mamun" (IMSAM) and member of the scientific committee of GEOPOL. He served as Ambassador of Greece to Ukraine between Autumn 2016 and Autumn 2019.

Greece's relationship with Kievan Rus is old, multifaceted and not one-sided. On the other hand Greece's ties with the Ukrainian space and historical entity are different from the relationship with the state of Ukraine as it emerged with the dissolution of the USSR.

The Greeks had a presence on the northern coast of the Black Sea thousands of years ago, well before the space that today constitutes the Ukrainian state had been shaped. Great colonies, like Olbia and Tyras, were founded in the 7th and 6th centuries BC. Byzantium expanded drastically his sphere of influence with the group baptism of the Russians of Kiev under Vladimir, in 988 AD.

In difficult times, Constantinople's Phanar worked for the stimulus of the orthodox conviction that was depressed by the Pope and the Catholic kings of Poland, which was then (1595) a dominant power. Two centuries later Corfu's wise men Evgenios Voulgaris and Nikiforos Theotokis took over as bishops, with the favor of Katerine the Great, in the lands of "Novorossiya" in southern Ukraine. During the same period Greeks from Crimea, at the instigation of

Katerine, founded Mariupoli, while others, played a leading role in the development of Odessa, founded as the great Russian port of the south, in 1794.

Twenty years later, in 1814, "Filiki Eteria" (the secret "Friendly Society") was established in Odessa and played a decisive role in the Greek Struggle for Independence. In 1919, the A' Corps of the Greek Army undertook unsuccessful and damaging for it operations against Bolsheviks in the hinterland of Odessa. Characteristic of the conflict of identities is that sometimes there is talk of Greek army campaign in southern Russia and other times for the campaign in Ukraine.

Perhaps the most important medieval monument of Kiev is the church of Hagia Sophia (11th century AD), a church covered with Byzantine mosaics and hagiographies.

Today's Ukrainians, mostly Orthodox believers, divided and bifurcated canonically and administratively, do not necessarily associate Orthodoxy with modern Greece, while they refer to Mount Athos with great respect and love. Greece's relationship with the state of Ukraine (since 1991) is governed by the logic of interstate relations, International Law and the understanding of both sides' interests. It's a cerebral relationship. Greeks are not connected by the mental bond which - despite the fluctuations - exists between them and the Serbs. The Ukrainians, an independent nation that still has a long road to maturity, for years saw Greeks through the prism of their sympathy for the Russians.

Greece, again, saw the Ukrainians as the difficult little brothers of the Russians. Greece's relationship with Ukraine depends upon its relation a) with Russia, b) with Turkey and (c) since 2013/14 with the whole West. Russian attack on Ukraine and the bloody war raging there has created for Greece unprecedented situations. It is an existential issue for Ukrainians and for this reason discussions on the political and negotiating errors committed by the Kyiv in the past should be avoided for the moment.

Kyiv's arrogance regarding its diplomatic communication with Greece is unacceptable and repulsive. Greece follows a policy in accordance with its values and interests. Complies with sanctions against Russia which, as was predictable, affect European societies the most, while winter is expected to hit harshly them. And all this for Ukraine which was not always inclined to listen to the advice of the EU before and after 2014.

Greece has done a lot for Kyiv, safeguarding at the same time its insular and land front line defenses. Furthermore, Greece has never pushed the leadership of Ukraine to make wrong choices. Former president Leonid Kuchma is aware of this. We supported the country's independence and territorial integrity, deplored alien machinations, and encouraged, together with our partners and allies, while there was still time, the implementation of the Minsk Protocols (2nd, 12.02.2015).

Greece's contributed bravely to the staffing of the monitoring mission (SMM) of the OSCE on the line of confrontation in Donbass. Greece also put aside, due to the circumstances, obligations of Ukraine regarding orders of a military nature. Furthermore, thousands of Ukrainians serve at any given time in the Greek-owned merchant fleet, who are obviously interested in not harming their interests and those of their employer.

Greece faces the Russian Federation and Ukraine, despite their common history, according to the rules of interstate relations, as two different, independent and sovereign states. Under normal circumstances, our relationship with each of the two states, develops independently and autonomously.

The fact that Moscow is encroaching fundamental principles and rules of International Law, thus affecting conduct of normal relations with Greece for an unknown period of time, does not provide any rights to Kyiv, which has not always been distinguished for actions friendly to Greece and Cyprus. The appearance, last April, of President Zelensky in Greek Parliament and the Cypriot

House of Representatives and his attempt to dictate policy in Athens has not been forgotten

Greece is and should be a country of Freedom of the Press and of thought, a refuge to all those fellow human beings suffering from the war. Greece is a European democratic state, where the public sector of the economy is clearly separated from the private.