

Moving Forward Together

Canada-Greece Relations since 1942



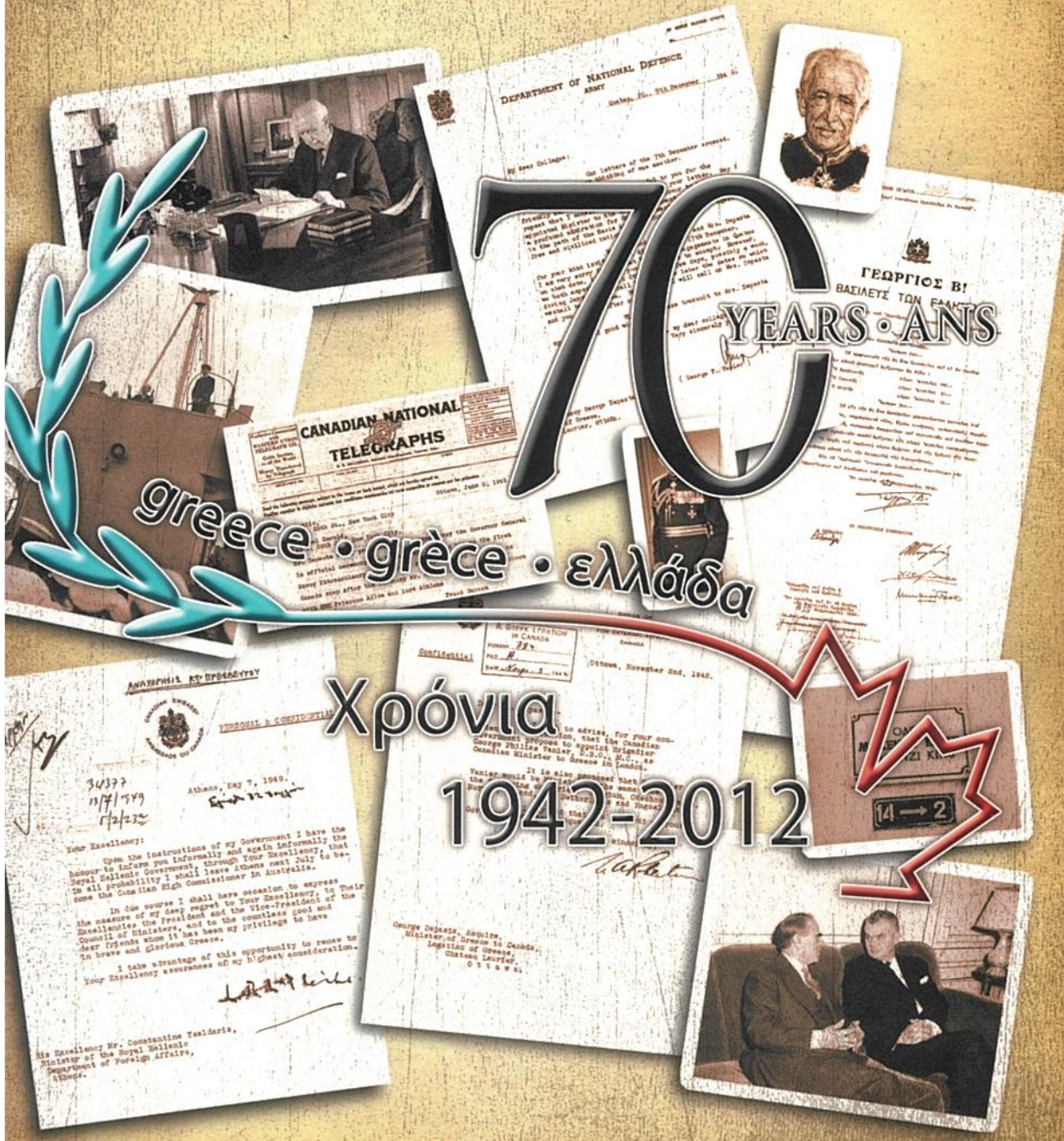
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Χρόνια
1942-2012

Hernan Tesler-Mabé

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In late May 2011, on his first trip since the recent federal election, Prime Minister Harper visited Greece. In Athens, with a Greek interpreter on his side, he boarded a helicopter to visit the small village of Kalavryta. The village was the site of a 19th-century monastery of Agia Lavra and a 15th-century Ottoman overlord's residence. There, on a chilly December day, the Nazis of Nazi Germany rounded up the village's inhabitants and cut them down with machine guns, including eight monks, torn from their duties. 'These are the things we must never forget,' Harper said after he visited their memorial, "even

Harper's visit to Kalavryta echoes many of the central themes of Canada's relationship with Greece. Forged in war and the aftermath of a century of global unrest, this trans-Atlantic relationship has united disparate peoples in a shared pursuit of prosperity. Seventy years on, the relationship stands as a testament of friendship.

Dr. Hernan Tesler-Mabé is a specialist in modern European history and teaches at the University of Ottawa. The views expressed are his alone and do not reflect the views of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada or the Government of Canada

Athens 2012

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Bonds That Unite

Canada-Greece relations stretch back to the late 19th century. A Canadian General arrived in Montreal in 1877, a time when the relationship was insignificant. By 1931, there were 100 Canadian immigrants across Canada, and the total t

Relations changed, suddenly, in 1939. With Hitler's Nazi Germany marching across Europe, Greek and British Commonwealth leaders fled the mainland. In 1941, the British reached out for friends. The British government opened a mission in Ottawa in 1941. The Greek and [British] Imperial War Office went to war at Britain's side

Moving Forward Together

Canada-Greece Relations since 1942

In late May 2011, on his first trip abroad after winning a majority during the recent federal election, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper headed for Greece. In Athens, with Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou at his side, he boarded a helicopter for the long journey northwards, to the small village of Kalavryta. This is hallowed ground. The site of the ancient monastery of Agia Lavra and a wellspring of rebellion against Greece's 19th-century Ottoman overlords, Kalavryta is also home to more recent memories. There, on a chilly December morning in 1943, occupying troops from Nazi Germany rounded up the town's men, marched them up a nearby hill, and cut them down with machine-guns. Almost five hundred men, including eight monks, torn from their prayers and meditations, died. "These are things we must never forget," observed Prime Minister Harper quietly as he visited their memorial, "even as we move forward together".¹

Harper's visit to Kalavryta, the first by a foreign head of government, echoes many of the central themes in Canada's long and close relationship with Greece. Forged in war and cold war, and honed during a lingering era of global unrest, this trans-Atlantic partnership joined two distant countries and disparate peoples in a shared struggle for freedom, democracy, and prosperity. Seventy years on, this is its story of perseverance in the service of friendship.

Bonds That Unite

Canada-Greece relations stretch back to 1899 when the first Greek Consul-General arrived in Montreal, but early bilateral ties were tenuous and insignificant. By 1931, there were still just 9,444 Greek immigrants scattered across Canada, and the total trade between the two countries was negligible.²

Relations changed, suddenly and forever, in the spring of 1941, when Hitler's Nazi Germany marched south through the Balkans and defeated Greek and British Commonwealth forces allied in defence of freedom. Greek leaders fled the mainland, located the government-in-exile in Cairo, and reached out for friends. They found one in Canada. In June 1942, Greece opened a mission in Ottawa to strengthen "the bonds which united the Greek and [British] Imperial forces on the battlefield".³ Canada, which had gone to war at Britain's side in September 1939, quickly reciprocated. In



Major-General
Georges P. Vanier,
Minister to the Greek
government-in-exile
who later served as
Canada's Governor
General (1959-1967)



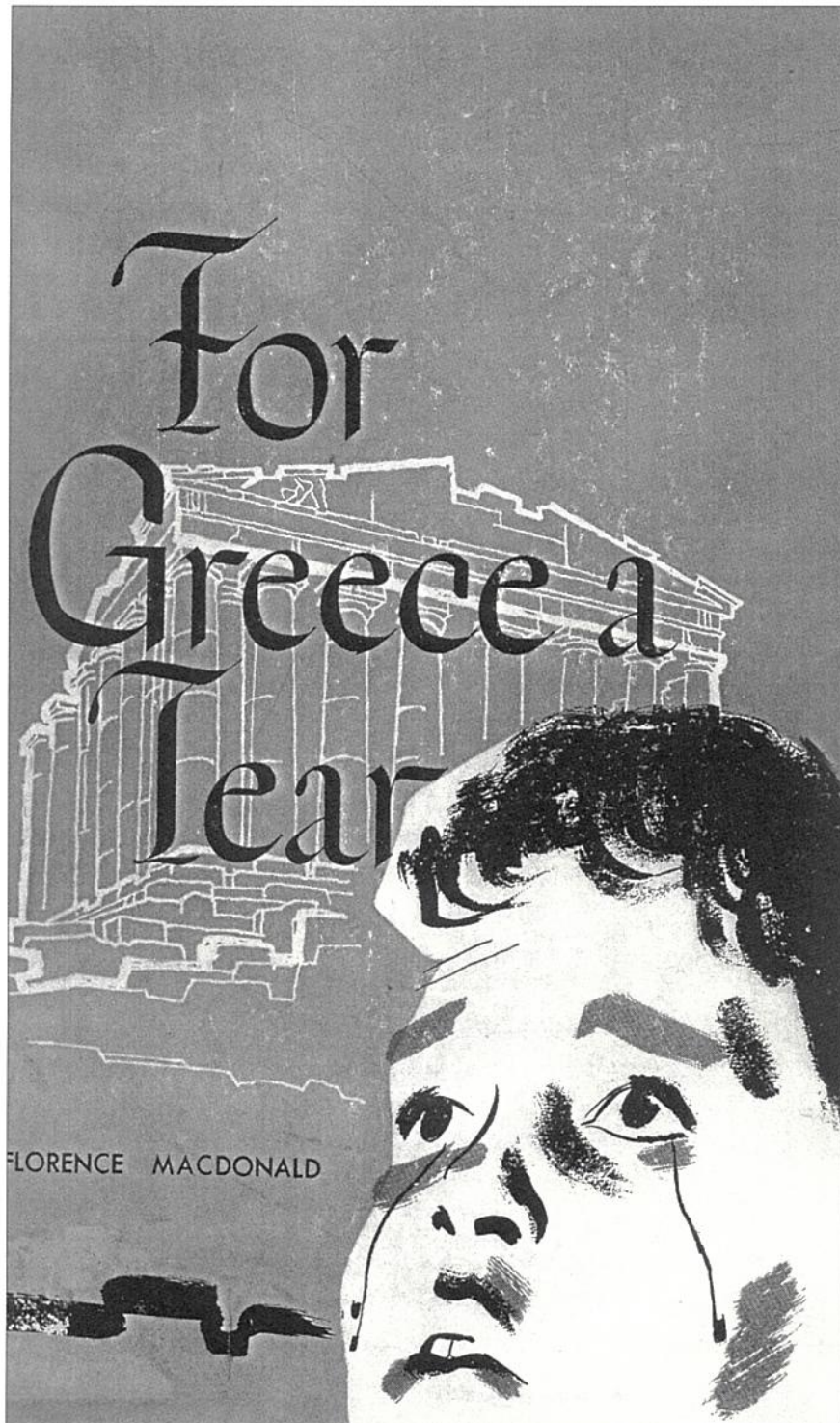
November 1942, Prime Minister W.L. Mackenzie King appointed one of Canada's most senior diplomats and future Governor General, Major-General Georges Vanier, Minister to the Greek government-in-exile.

Canadians rallied to Greece's side during the Second World War. Communities across the country backed the Greek War Relief Fund and sent a stream of supplies through the Canadian Red Cross. In 1942, the Canadian government began shipping 15,000 tons of wheat monthly through neutral Sweden to stave off starvation in occupied Greece.⁴ Canada's support for the suffering Greek population was underpinned by Prime Minister Mackenzie King's romantic view of Greek heroism.

When Greek King George II visited Canada in July 1942 with Prime Minister Emmanouil Tsouderos at his side, the Canadian leader praised him lavishly for his bravery, thanking him for "resisting Hitler in the Old World".⁵ By the end of the war, over \$3 million worth of Canadian aid had poured into Athens. The trans-Atlantic link between the two countries was further strengthened when Canada returned the new Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou and his government-in-exile to their native land aboard the HMCS Prince David, landing them at the port of Piraeus in October of 1944 to a tremendous welcome. Canada's aid to Greece during the Second World War would not be forgotten.

The postwar relationship was closer still. During the summer of 1945, the two countries raised the status of their diplomatic missions to full-fledged embassies. King asked Major-General L.R. Laflèche to head the new Canadian mission. Laflèche was a strong appointment. A French-Canadian veteran of the First World War and a skilled administrator, Laflèche had joined King's wartime cabinet when the prime minister most needed help in Quebec, and he enjoyed his confidence. King paid close attention to





Cover of book FOR GREECE A TEAR. The Story of the War Relief Fund of Canada, by Florence Macdonald (Brunswick Press Ltd., 1954)

The Greek War Relief Fund of Canada reached a total that far exceeded the hopes of its founders. Its great achievement, however, cannot be measured in dollars alone. It saved countless lives and, above all, it did for the people of Greece what they had done for the peoples of the free world. In FOR GREECE A TEAR an effort has been made to tell in simple terms the story of the Greek War Relief Fund of Canada. It is a heart-warming story of Canadian generosity and of a typically Canadian response to a call for aid from a valiant nation.

Georgios Papandreou, Prime Minister of Greece, speaking to the Ship's Company of H.M.C.S. PRINCE DAVID before disembarking from the ship, which had returned him and his ministers to Greece (16 October 1944) (Library and Archives Canada; PD-717/ 1967-052 NPC)



Lafleche's dispatches from Athens. The ambassador flattered the aging prime minister with gifts of Greek antiquities and fulsome reports on plans to rename city streets in Athens and Piraeus in King's honour to celebrate Canada's contribution to Greece's liberation. Upon learning that an Athens street had been renamed in his honour, King confided to his diary that this "was the greatest [honour] of the many that have been bestowed in the course of my public life".⁶ In 1947, King's name – resplendently carved on marble and lettered in gold – was placed on one of Piraeus' main streets to celebrate the "Canadian who, in his own right and as personifying Canada, is recalled even more vividly than ancient Zeus".⁷

Lafleche also tracked the continued flow of Canadian aid – including food, medical supplies, and millions of items of clothing – to Greek civilians trapped in the bloody civil war between Communist and non-Communist partisans that erupted in 1946. King, like most Canadians, watched with horror as the Soviet Union's communist allies threatened Western Europe's fragile postwar democracies. "The most serious noted in March 1948, "is the situation at the borders of Greece. It is truly a tragedy that we have not been able to get Canadian diplomats agreed, and without NATO) was created in 1949. In Europe, they welcomed Greek membership as formal allies in the fight for



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ΑΝΤΙΓΡΑΦΗ ΜΟΝΟ ΤΩ ΚΑΤΩ...
"Από τον Υπουργό Εξωτερικών..."

ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΣ Β' ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΤΩΝ ΕΛΛΗΝΩΝ
"Από τον Υπουργό Εξωτερικών..."

CONFIDENTIAL
OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA, November 28th, 1944.
Dear Mr. Depasta:-
I wish to advise for your confidential information, that the Canadian Government proposes to appoint Brigadier General Phillippe Depasta, C.B.C., D.C., as Canadian Minister to Greece in London.
It is also proposed that Brigadier Tepler would be Minister at the same time to the following countries: Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Norway, Poland, the Netherlands and Yugoslavia.
I may add that the agreement of your Government has been requested.
Yours sincerely,
George Depasta, Esquire,
Minister of Greece to Canada,
Chelsea, London, C 11 A W 1.

DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE
ARMY
Ottawa, P.C., 211, Parliament Hill, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
Dear Mr. Depasta:-
Our letters of the 7th November enclosed, I am very grateful to you for the prompt reply that you have given to the proposed Minister to the Greek Government in London. I have a personal address for the Greek Government in London. I have the full name of the Minister to their office and will send you a copy shortly after my arrival.
My wife and I thank you and Mr. Depasta for your kind letter and the information that you have given us. We are very glad to hear that you are going to be in London for a few days. We will be in London on the 15th and I will call on you then.
Yours sincerely,
George P. Lafleche,
Chief Liaison Officer,
Department of National Defence.

Executive Commission with WESTERN UNION TELEGRAPHS CO.
Cable Service, in all the World
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CANADIAN NATIONAL TELEGRAPHS
A. S. GALLAGHER, Montreal and Toronto, Canada.
Send the following message, subject to the terms on back hereof, which are hereby agreed to
Visible message in English subject to conditions mentioned on reverse hereof in French per the printer
Ottawa, June 5, 1945
Atlantic, 202 W. 23rd St., New York City
National Herald, 149 W. 23rd St., New York City.
Mr. Depasta today presented to His Excellency the Governor General in official ceremony his letters accrediting him as the first Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Greece to Canada stop after the ceremony Mr. and Mrs. Depasta had luncheon with H.M. Princess Alice and Lord Athlone
FRANK THORNTON

Correspondence referring to the establishment of diplomatic relations between Canada and Greece (1942-1949)



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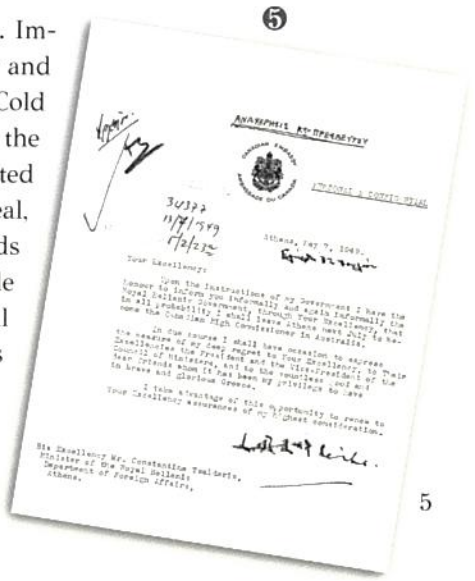
Lafleche also tracked the continued flow of Canadian aid – including food, medical supplies, and millions of items of clothing – to Greek civilians trapped in the bloody civil war between Communist and non-Communist partisans that erupted in 1946. King, like most Canadians, watched with horror as the Soviet Union's communist allies threatened West-

ern Europe's fragile postwar democracies. "The most serious perhaps of all", the prime minister noted in March 1948, "is the situation that is developing in Palestine and on the borders of Greece. It is truly appalling how far the Russians have been permitted and have been able to get ahead in the four years since the war". Canadian diplomats agreed, and when the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was created in 1949 to confront the Communist threat in Europe, they welcomed Greek membership in 1952. Canada and Greece had become formal allies in the fight for European democracy.

Postwar immigration also strengthened bilateral ties. Impressed by Greek heroics during the Second World War and inspired by the democratic ideals of ancient Greece, Cold War Canada welcomed a wave of Greek immigrants. In the decade between 1951 and 1961, 35,000 Greeks emigrated to Canada.⁸ They settled mainly in Toronto and Montreal, where they created lively and vibrant neighbourhoods that changed the very nature of those cities. The affable Glenn Cochrane, a long time Toronto reporter and local celebrity, recalled in his memoirs how the "newcomers brightened up streets by planting flower beds and building pergolas for their grapes; they brought music and a sense of style that was new to their new city".⁹



George Depasta, Minister of Greece to Canada, accompanies King George B' during his visit to Canada (June 1942)



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In “Toronto the Good”, long derided for its uptight “White Anglo-Saxon Protestant” culture, Greek restaurants and tavernas spilled onto the sidewalks of Danforth Avenue, signalling an era of urban revival. The immigrant wave continued unabated in the 1960s, when a further 65,000 Greeks – many of them family members of those that had arrived in the 1950s – arrived on Canadian shores. The new arrivals embraced their new home but remained devoted to maintaining their religion, language, and ethnic identity, passing them to their children through language schools and regional associations, and keeping alive the ties to their native land.¹⁰

The Conservative government of Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, elected in 1957, was anxious to build on these developing political and ethnic ties. In the late 1950s, Canadian Minister of Trade and Commerce Gordon Churchill visited Athens to invigorate commercial relations between Canada and Greece. Armed with a fiery temperament and a strong sense of honour, the veteran of both world wars was an ideal emissary to south-eastern Europe. In his own gruff manner, he impressed Greek officials, who welcomed a deepening of the relationship. In April 1961, Greek Prime Minister Constantine Karamanlis paid a three-day visit to Ottawa to promote the Canada-Greece relationship, meeting with Diefenbaker and establishing a high-level



Prime Minister J. Diefenbaker with Greek Prime Minister C. Karamanlis at a North Atlantic Treaty Organization conference (December 1957) (Thanks to the University of Saskatchewan for providing the image and permitting its reproduction; MG01/XVII/JGD 4464)

dialogue over important political, economic, and immigration issues.

Canada’s diplomats were delighted and assured Diefenbaker that the Greek prime minister’s visit was prompted “by sincere friendship and close co-operation based upon a community of ideals, of civilization and of political interests”.¹¹

Love against Tyranny

The easy and harmonious partnership of the postwar period ended suddenly in the spring of 1967, when Greek military officers seized power amidst a climate of political instability. Handling the new regime was a real challenge for Prime Minister L.B. Pearson’s government, which found it dif-

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difficult to strike the right balance between supporting Greek democracy and Canada's broader political interests in the Mediterranean country. Caught in this complex situation, the Canadian ambassador in Athens, H.F. Feaver, mocked the new regime's "ridiculous" attacks on miniskirts and "beatnik" long hair while grimly noting the junta's mounting human rights abuses. Despite these concerns, Feaver insisted that Ottawa back the new government as part of Canada's cold war strategy of keeping Greece "an effective partner in NATO."¹² His view was echoed in the Department of External Affairs, whose diplomats agreed that Canada ought to pursue a moderate course and avoid disrupting bilateral relations, conscious of "the importance there is from the military, economic and political points of view to provide for the continuance of good relations with Greece".¹³

Reconciling good relations with the military junta and Canada's democratic principles proved much more difficult than it looked. By 1968, Canadian officials were frequently pressed by Greek-Canadians anxious to help fellow Greeks imprisoned by the regime. In turn, the Greek embassy in Ottawa asked Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's government to take action against Greek dissidents visiting Canada, a request Canadian officials rejected.¹⁴ Indeed, Toronto would soon become a hotbed of democratic opposition to the junta. In 1969, the exiled socialist politician, Andreas Papandreou, arrived at York University, assuming the Osler-Hammond Lectureship in Economics. In time, he became a close friend of Canada's prime minister, the progressive Pierre Trudeau, the two men united by their scholarly backgrounds and their profound attachment to liberal democracy.

Papandreou, a staunch opponent of the military junta, used the freedom he enjoyed in Canada to protest loudly against the Greek regime. And along Toronto's Danforth Avenue, in small cafes like the Trojan Horse, Greek democrats dreamed and sang. "As the tables are upended", wrote one reporter of the atmosphere in the 1970s, "a song rises from the insurgents, a song that pits love against tyranny, warm tears against cold steel, an anthem of the heart that yearns



One of several streets in Greece named after Canada's 10th Prime Minister, Mackenzie King; this one in Thessaloniki

for the freedom of cool Aegean waters while trapped in the dried-blood dungeons of military dictatorship".¹⁵

Growing international criticism of the Greek junta added to the strain on Canada-Greece relations. By the fall of 1969, the Greek regime was charged with frequently violating human rights and engaging in acts of torture against its civilian population. Within a year, Greece had been suspended from the Council of Europe, a strategy that – in Canadian eyes – “failed to secure any improvement in the lot of the Greek people and in hastening Greece’s return to democracy”.¹⁶ Canada rejected similar protests that called for Greece’s suspension from NATO. However, standing by Athens was getting tougher all the time, Canadian officials bristling at having to deny the celebrated Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis the chance to write music for a Stratford stage production in response to official Greek protests.¹⁷

The Canadian government could no longer withhold comment on Greek affairs and was forced to act in the spring of 1970. On May 22, Pierre Trudeau’s secretary of state for external affairs, Mitchell Sharp, rose to his feet in the House of Commons. Speaking with great care and deep conviction, the veteran minister lamented the human rights violations occurring in Greece and the Greek government’s failure to suppress them. Sharp added his hope that the “[Greek] Government will take [our views] into account in carrying out its declared intention to restore democratic freedoms in Greece”.¹⁸ The measured criticism infuriated the Greek government, resulting in a period of considerable strain between the two nations punctuated by sniping, mutual condemnation, and bitterness.

Return to Normalcy

Discredited internationally and divided internally, Greece’s military junta finally collapsed in 1974 when the country held its first democratic elections in over a decade. Canada embraced the opportunity to encourage Greece back towards democracy and to welcome it again into the international community. Aware of the fragility of the fledgling democracy, Canada moved quickly to recognize the new democratic regime that in its early months stared down 300 military officers threatening to stage a second military coup. In 1976, Canadian officials invited Greek Foreign Minister Dimitrios Bitsios to Ottawa for a two-day visit “intended to mark the return to normalcy in [Canadian] relations with Greece now that democratic government has been restored in Athens”.¹⁹ By the end of the year, Canadian

and Greek officials were their two countries together

The restoration of democracy momentum during the the Canadian Archaeologist Fossey, a McGill professor. Disillusioned by the the auspices of the British obtained the required Canadian school. With Greece, Michel Gauvin automatic trouble-shooter in public, the Congo, and the Institute. Since its establishment institutional institution in the

The quickening momentum relationship. Though still improving, Canadian exports million in 1978, up from boasted Canadian officials end of the year. In return raisins, olives, and footwear lion in exports in 1970.

More important, the quipped, when it came is people”.²² This was across the Atlantic in the new life into relations. founder Don Jami multilateral talks covering East, Cyprus, and Greece deputy minister for foreign Canada, holding meetings time to visit with Greece

There were three months the year, Minister of National of the Second World War and Canadian peacekeeping Staff, Admiral Royal



and Greek officials were once again celebrating the strong ties that bound their two countries together.

The restoration of democracy gave bilateral relations some badly needed momentum during the late 1970s. This was reflected in the establishment of the Canadian Archaeological Institute in Athens in February 1976 by John Fossey, a McGill professor of Archaeology and Jean Desmarais, a Ph.D. student. Disillusioned by the cancellation of their 1973 archaeological dig under the auspices of the British School at Athens because the school had not obtained the required permits, they decided to establish an independent Canadian school. With help from the dynamic Canadian Ambassador to Greece, Michel Gauvin – a veteran of the Second World War and diplomatic trouble-shooter who had represented Canada in the Dominican Republic, the Congo, and Vietnam – they founded the Canadian Archaeological Institute. Since its establishment, the institute has served as a vital educational institution in the Greek capital.²⁰

The quickening momentum was reflected too in other aspects of the relationship. Though still modest by any measure, trade was undoubtedly improving. Canadian exports from barley to scrap iron to furs totalled \$55 million in 1978, up from \$17.8 million in 1970. At this rate of growth, boasted Canadian officials, Canada's exports might top \$80 million by the end of the year. In return, Greece sent Canada \$36 million worth of cheese, raisins, olives, and footwear in 1978, a sevenfold increase over its \$4.78 million in exports in 1970.²¹

More important, the prominent Canadian journalist Hugh Winsor quipped, when it came to bilateral trade, "the real commodity of exchange is people".²² This was evident in the stream of high-level visitors that flitted across the Atlantic in the second half of the decade, determined to breathe new life into relations. In 1977, Canada's foreign minister, the lively Newfoundlander Don Jamieson, travelled to Greece to engage in bilateral and multilateral talks covering such critical issues as the situation in the Middle East, Cyprus, and Greece-Turkey relations. The following year, Greece's deputy minister for foreign affairs, Andreas Andrianopoulos, travelled to Canada, holding meetings with ministers and officials as well as taking the time to visit with Greek-Canadian communities.

There were three more top-level exchanges the next year. At the start of the year, Minister of National Defence Barney Danson, a decorated veteran of the Second World War who had lost an eye in Normandy, visited Greece and Canadian peacekeepers in nearby Cyprus. In June, the Chief of the Defence Staff, Admiral Robert Falls, travelled to Greece, and his Greek coun-