



October 7, 2008

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Administration Policy vis-à-vis Greece and Visa Waiver Program Expansion

Dear President Bush:

As national president of the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA), and on behalf of the 3 million Americans of Greek heritage, and countless Philhellenes, I am writing to express our discontent with your administration's policy toward Greece, specifically pertaining to Greece's aspiration to join the United States Visa Waiver Program.

Since the Department of State's formal nomination of Greece to be a visa waiver nation in September 2007, Greece has worked in close cooperation with the Department of Homeland Security hosting security reviews to comply with the security requirements and meet all necessary criteria, in preparation for VWP expansion this fall. We understand and agree that Greece must sign all the required technical documents (MOUs) and adhere to the security parameters that are required of a visa waiver nation. We expect Greece to fully comply.

However recently, it has been brought to our attention that Greece's path to become a visa waiver nation has come to a halt due to a "political issue" that has arisen this year between the United States and Greece, two long-standing NATO allies. We have reason to believe that the "political issue" involves Greece exercising its veto power as a member of NATO—as is her right to do—in April 2008 to prevent the bid of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) to join NATO until a mutually-agreeable solution on the latter country's name can be reached between Greece and FYROM.

We deem the obstruction in Greece's roadmap to become a visa waiver nation as an act by the United States that is unacceptable and extremely disconcerting to the American Hellenic community. We contend it is an act that is in retaliation to a Greek policy that has no bearing on Greece's well-documented merits to join the VWP. Among the many merits of Greece's position are the following:

- Greece is the only nation of all the candidate nations that has been formally nominated by the State Department;
- Greece's visa refusal rate is well below 3 percent¹; and
- Greece's passport biometrics exceeds technology used by current VWP nations.

As a result, we have no choice but to conclude that the action taken by the United States to freeze Greece's progress on the eve of VWP expansion is a discriminatory one.

- *We believe it is a measure that punishes a NATO ally and its citizens for taking measures to protect its national identity and cultural heritage.*

¹ Greece's FY07 visa refusal rate was 1.6%, according to a GAO report issued September 2008



- *We contend it adversely affects the promotion of economic activity and tourism in the United States.²*
- *Moreover, it is act that punishes American citizens who have relatives, business associates, and friends who reside in Greece.*
- *Of course, there is hardly any American citizen of Greek heritage who is not affected by this action.*

AHEPA, the nation's largest and oldest American-based Greek heritage grassroots membership organization, was founded on principles that combated discrimination. We will not tolerate an act that is in blatant violation of our founding principles, and moreover, an act that in our opinion violates the democratic principles upon which the United States is founded.

Mr. President, we strongly urge you to intervene and provide a "green light" so that Greece's rightful path to become a visa waiver nation can proceed to fruition.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ike Gulas
National President

CC: Stephen Hadley, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, National Security Council
The Honorable Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State, U.S Department of State
The Honorable Michael Chertoff, Secretary of Homeland Security, U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Members of Congress

The mission of the AHEPA family is to promote the ancient Greek ideals of education, philanthropy, civic responsibility and family and individual excellence through community service and volunteerism.

² A comparison between Greece (non VWP country) and Portugal (a VWP country), two nations similar in demographics and economic relations with the United States, reveals that there are 50% more visitors from Portugal than from Greece. The main reason is the need for Greeks to acquire a visa, which costs \$100, and waiting for weeks or months for an interview with a consulate. (Remarks of Dan Griswold, CATO, at a panel discussion "2007: A Year for Visa Waiver Program Expansion?" hosted by AHEPA, January 19, 2007.)