24/09/2024

Greece – Serbia: 30 years of invaluable friendship in Sydney



The annual celebration of friendship between the Greek and Serbian communities of Sydney took place on Sunday, 22 September 2024, with particular splendour, with the significant presence of the diplomatic authorities of Serbia and Greece in Australia. This year, the institution of friendship has hopefully reached 30 years since it started. This celebration – now an institution – is always kindly awaited by the two communities and is held, as is known, in the middle to the end of September every year. Last year, however, due to the long-term absence of the coordinators from Australia, the meeting of the two communities did not take place, as of course during the difficult years of the pandemic.

It is recalled that the first “Greek-Serbian Friendship Day” took place in 1993 in the hall of the Serbian Orthodox Parish-Community of St Archdeacon Stefan, in the western suburbs of Sydney, Plumpton/Rooty Hill, and since then the meeting has continued in the same place, hopefully now reaching three decades.

The doors of the large parish hall are always open wide welcoming Greeks, Serbs, other Orthodox Christians, but also friends of the two communities so that

everyone can experience the rich and unique Balkan music and dance program and strong feelings of friendship. The facade and the interior of the building were decorated with the flags of Greece and Cyprus everywhere, the star of Macedonia and of course the flags of Serbia.

The undivided help of the Greeks to the Orthodox Serbs during the Yugoslav wars



The love that the Serbs have for the Greeks of Australia, Greece and Cyprus in the celebration is evident with the welcome and hospitality they offered. As the organisers reminded, the Greeks rushed to help the Serbs in the early 1990s and later towards the end of the same decade when the Serbs were being tested by the civil wars in the former Yugoslavia.

The dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation wounded the souls of ordinary Serbs, but also of the other Slavic peoples that made up this mighty Balkan country. The US-NATO bombing attacks in the late 1990s, particularly in Serbia, created a wave of undivided support from Greeks, Cypriots and Greek expatriates around the world to Orthodox Serbs throughout the then-Yugoslavian territory. In these tragic moments of the attacks against Serbia, the Greeks and especially the Macedonians in northern Greece accepted and hosted in their homes in Thessaloniki, Kavala, Pieria, Pella, Kastoria and elsewhere hundreds of orphaned Serb children from Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and other areas of the former Yugoslavia, trying to ease the souls of wounded children as much as possible.

The Serbs, inside Serbia, but also their expatriates (such as in Sydney, Australia), never forget the psychological and financial help and love of the Greeks towards the orphaned Serb children and the displaced and war-torn families of the Serbs. The Greek aid is deeply etched in the memory of the Serbian people and of course the Serbian diaspora.

The opening of the event, messages and official guests

The “30th annual Greek-Serbian and Orthodox Cultural Friendship Day” began with a Divine Liturgy which was lead by the Parish Priest of the Serbian Orthodox Church of Saint Archdeacon Stefanos, Father Aleksandar Ivanovic. The Divine Liturgy was attended from the morning by the Ambassador of Serbia in Canberra, His Excellency Mr. Rade Stefanovic, and the Consul General of Greece in Sydney, Mr. Yannis Mallikourtis, for the first time. After the church service, the diplomatic representatives, parishioners and hundreds of guests moved to the adjacent hall for lunch and to watch the celebration, where a large number of slides were shown on a projector with various photographic snapshots of the celebration since it began.

The celebration began with the singing of the national anthems of Serbia, Greece and Cyprus. Immediately afterwards Fr. Alexander prayed for the health of the Serbs and Greeks and all those present and blessed the food prepared by the tireless women of the local Serbian Philoptochos. Father Alexander then thanked the Greeks for their attendance, praising the friendship between the two peoples and communities throughout history. Due to commitments, the Consul General of Greece was represented by the director of the Diplomatic Office of the Greek Consulate General, Ms. Anastasia Christofilopoulou.

First, the Serbian Ambassador was invited to address a short greeting from the stage, who welcomed the initiative of the said Serbian Orthodox Parish towards the Greek community, emphasising once again the unbreakable ties between the two nations and peoples for centuries and especially in recent years. Ms. Christofilopoulou addressed a similar greeting, focusing on the strong relations between the two peoples. She congratulated the organisers Mr. Dimitris Kametopoulos on behalf of the Greek community and Mr. Branko Kondic from the Serbian community. Afterwards, Mr. Kametopoulos read a message from the High Commissioner of Cyprus in Canberra, His Excellency Mr. Antonis Sammoutis. In his own message, Mr. Sammoutis focused on the important cultural, geographical, historical and religious connection between Greeks and Serbs, emphasising the common struggles of Greeks, Greek Cypriots and Serbs for democracy and

freedom, wishing Cyprus to find its freedom after 50 years of present occupation by Turkey, as he pointed out.



After the speeches of the officials, there was the cutting of a symbolic cake with the number 30 on it, by the officials themselves who cut the cake to mark this year's event! Other officials who attended this year's celebration, from the Greek communiter, were the Parish Priest of the Greek Orthodox Parish-Community of Saint Paraskevi and Saint Barbara in Blacktown, Father Alexios Kapandritis and the president of Dr. Vlassis Brakoulias, the president of the Pan-Macedonian Association of Sydney and New South Wales, Ms. Anastasia Karakominaki and the committee member, Ms. Eugenia Kapori, the treasurer of the Association of Greek-Australian Teachers of New South Wales, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory, Ms. Maria Alibaki-Tatara and others.

A rich music and dance program as per every year

The four-hour music and dance program was curated and presented in the three languages (Serbian, Greek and English) with a lot of flair by MC Dimitris Kametopoulos (one of the pioneers of this annual celebration of friendship) and, for the first time, Branko Kodić. The presence of local Greek and Serbian dance schools, as well as the participation of a dance group from the Bulgarian parish, gave a unique colour of traditional costumes and sounds inside the hall of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

In terms of the Greek groups that performed, were the Cretan Brotherhood of Sydney and NSW under the direction of choreographer Mr. Emmanuel Vitentzakis, which danced traditional Cretan dances, the intermediate and senior groups of the Cypriot Community of Sydney and NSW with choreographers Harry and Nelli Klavdiou, with dances and songs of the Great Island of Cyprus (a highlight was the traditional breaking of the pitcher in the style of a theatrical performance during a Cypriot dance!) and the “Seismos” dance group, again lead by choreographers Haris and Nellis Klavdiou, who presented traditional dances from the Aegean Islands, Macedonia and Thrace, bringing a very Greek “air” to the hall. The Serbians enthusiastically rose from their seats, giving warm applause to the Greek dance groups at each of their performances. At the same time, the Bulgarian dancing group from Sydney “Bulgarian Rhythms” which made its appearance for the first time at this year’s celebration, received warm applause for the presentation of traditional Bulgarian dances from the Pirin region and from central and northern Bulgaria, lending even more to the Balkan…flavour of the thirty years of this Greek-Serbian celebration and institution.

For their part, the Serbian dance groups also impressed, as always, with the speed of their dance movements, their colorful costumes and traditional sounds from the north of Serbia and the province of Vojvodina, central Serbia and the province of Šumadija in the southeast, as far as Kosovo, but also areas on the country’s southern borders.



Fun and entertainment for all and the celebration to take place in 2025 for the 31 years of the friendship event

From 4.00 pm and for the next two hours, a rich dance program unfolded with traditional and modern Greek songs, Serbian dances (known as “kolo”) and Bulgarian songs for the entertainment of the audience. This year’s celebration of 30 years between the Greek and Serbian communities was characterised as the best so far in terms of attendance, enjoyment and entertainment. Once again, the already strong relations between the two communities were strengthened.

The next date for the celebration between the Greeks and Serbs of Sydney was set for next year, in mid-September 2025, for the “31st annual Greek-Serbian and Orthodox Cultural Friendship Day”. Until then…the Greek-Serbian friendship, love and mutual respect between the two nations, states and the two communities in Sydney and New South Wales will remain strong through time and will remain part of the multicultural fabric of Australia.










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