

## **Zito i Ellas! Long Live Hellas! Mark Buttigieg's latest speech on Greek Independence Day in NSW Parliament (Video)**



Kalitera mias oras eleftheri zoi, para saranta hronia sklavia kai filaki. That translates to “One hour of free life is worth more than 40 years of slavery and prison.”

On 25 March this year Greek people celebrate the 200th anniversary of the declaration of their war for independence against the Ottomans, also known as the Greek Revolution. The Greek people had been under Ottoman rule since the fall of Constantinople on the 29 May 1453 for four centuries, when they bravely declared they would fight for independence on 25 March 1821. It would take many years of fighting against a powerful empire as well as many years of negotiations between the Empire and the western powers before modern Greece was finally declared an independent nation on 3 February 1830, with the London protocol.

The celebration of 25 March, Independence Day, is very significant for the Greek people because it fills them with immense national pride, and justly so. What the ancestors of the modern Greeks achieved by declaring war on that fateful day in March in 1821 is nothing short of a miracle. The Greeks knew very well that they

were up against it when they decided to fight their occupiers and yet they went ahead and did it. This only highlights how brave and resolute they were and how much freedom meant to them. The love of freedom is a concept central to the Greek Revolution and it is a concept which is fundamental in understanding the modern Greek psyche. The Greeks believe, and perhaps they are right, that no other nation in the world loves freedom as much as they do. For the Greek people, the ones alive today, as well as those who were alive back in 1821, life is meaningless and worthless unless it is free. This is clearly enunciated by the very famous verses of Thourios, a poem written by Rigas Fereos, which read:

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Freedom was so important to the Greek people fighting for independence that they were happy to die fighting for it. Their flag was chosen to represent two things: their love for freedom and their love for their land surrounded by the sea. This is why they chose a flag of nine blue stripes and nine white stripes. The blue stripes represent both the sea and also the five syllables of the Greek word for freedom: E-LEF-THE-RI-A. The white stripes represent both the land and also the four syllables of the Greek words for “or death”: I-THA-NA-TOS. “Eleftheria i thanatos”, or “Freedom or death”.

This is the message embedded in the Greek flag and the essence of the Greek spirit. There it is: a clear testament to the love of their country, their people and everything that was sacred to them and, thus, worth fighting for and dying for. It is a testament that reminds their descendants of what their ancestors had to sacrifice in order for them to live in freedom. It is a gift to all of the modern Greek people from their forefathers, the most beautiful and precious gift of all—freedom. The Greek people are acutely aware of the debt they owe to their ancestors—these brave men and women who fought and died so they can be free—and the legacy the heroes of the revolution have left behind.

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Wherever in the world they are, Greeks today want to do justice to the sacrifices of their ancestors. This connects them all in a sense of national pride. They love their country and their nation with such intensity that it is sometimes confusing and

difficult for outsiders to understand the passion and the history that binds all Greeks together and with the country. It is because Greeks know that they come from the same men and women who some 200 years ago, back in 1821, chose to sacrifice everything for the ideals of freedom and of country—the ideal of Hellas. This is a special bond that cannot be broken. It is a bond that defines what it means to be Greek.

Zito i Elias! Long Live Hellas!

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