

Obama makes appeal on Halki

US president, on Ankara visit, urges Turks to reopen Orthodox seminary, calls for 'bicomunal' Cyprus

US President Barack Obama, addressing Turkey's Grand National Assembly, urged Ankara to reopen the Halki Orthodox Seminary near Istanbul as a gesture to show it supports freedom of expression and pushed for a solution to the Cyprus problem.

On his first official visit to the country, the president praised Turkey for taking steps toward granting rights to its Kurdish citizens. But he urged the Turks to drop their resistance to reopening a historic Orthodox seminary located on an island near Istanbul, a key demand by the European Union which Turkey hopes to join. "The United States strongly

supports Turkey's bid to become a member of the European Union... [but] Turkey has its own responsibilities," Obama told an audience which included his Turkish counterpart Abdullah Gul. "Freedom of religion and expression lead to a strong and vibrant society that only strengthens the state, which is why steps like reopening the Halki Seminary will send such an important signal inside Turkey and beyond," Obama added. The Turks have consistently dodged Greek appeals for the reopening of the seminary, asserting that a religious institution cannot exist in Turkey without government oversight.

Obama also offered US support for a new drive to reunify Cyprus. "The United States is willing to offer

all the help sought by the parties as they work toward a just and lasting settlement that reunifies Cyprus into a bizonal and bicomunal federation," he said.

The US president also encouraged Turkey to resolve its dispute with Armenia. "I know there are strong views in this chamber about the terrible events of 1915," he said in reference to the widespread killings of Armenians by Ottoman Turks. The US president avoided using the word "genocide" as he had done early last year when he was a presidential candidate. He added, "The best way forward for the Turkish and Armenian people is a process that works through the past in a way that is honest, open and constructive."



The price of a Bulgarian baby in Greece is 18 000 euro, expert says

Bulgarian children were the largest number of all children victims of human trafficking in Greece, Bulgarian National Anti-Trafficking Commission chief secretary Antoaneta Vassileva was quoted by Bulgarian news agency Focus as saying on April 7 2009.

"Because of demographic problems, there is high demand for children in Greece," she told a forum on fighting human trafficking. The event was organised by the National Investigative Service and RiskMonitor foundation.

In 2008, there were seven cases of trafficking of Bulgarian babies, most of whom were destined for Greece, she said.

According to her, the price for a baby boy was 18 000 euro and for a baby girl between 13 000 and 14 000 euro. Usually the money was paid in two transactions, she said, but in most cases the mother - usually of Roma origin - got no more than 3000 euro.

If the buyers did not like the baby very much, the price could go down, she said.

Vassileva said that hospitals were well aware of the trafficking scheme. Usually a baby that was to be trafficked was not registered when born or it was registered as a child with a Greek father.

Lawyers and notaries were also involved in the scheme.

A major problem was that no one in Bulgaria kept a record of pregnant women who leave the country, meaning that there was no means of recording when a woman left the country pregnant but returned without a child.

For one Greek American family, the hunt for greens is deeply rooted

THREE GENERATIONS: Elaine Panousis, left, Alexia Haidos, right, and Alexandra Panousis, seated.

Alexandra Panousis passes down her passion for the wild mustards and other plants of the Palos Verdes Peninsula. These days, when Alexandra Panousis takes her girls out to cut weeds for dinner, she stays in the car, directing the action from the front seat of a new Jaguar. Not those, she tells her daughter, Elaine Panousis. You want the type with the yellow flowers. Get the ones with the thinnest stems and the finest leaves, she tells her granddaughter, Alexia Haidos. And when you clean them, bend the stems so they snap at the most tender part.

It's not that Alexandra is all that bossy; it's just that she's almost 97 years old. And though she still gets hungry for horta, it's getting to be a little hard for her to hunt the hillsides and vacant lots of the Palos Verdes Peninsula the way she has for the last 75 years.

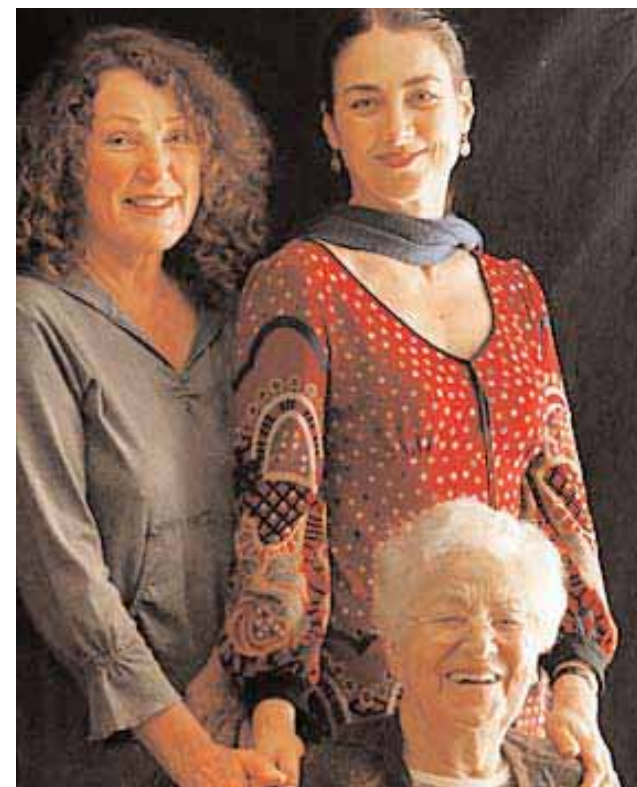
Horta is Greek for greens, including the yellow-flowered wild mustards that light up Southern California in the spring. And Elaine and Alexia are happy to help Alexandra find them. For them, hunting for wild greens -- and Greek cooking in general -- is not only the way to eat well, but also the way to renew family bonds and to keep alive a traditional culture that could easily have been lost to assimilation.

When it comes to cooking, Alexandra's rules are simple but firm. "Use good stuff, good quality, and you'll be a good cook," she says. That includes buying the right cut of meat and using fruits and vegetables in season (the epitome of which is using wild food like the greens).

Even more important: "Cooking takes time, and you have to be patient." For her turlou-turlou, Greek grandma cooking at its best, the vegetables bake at high heat for more than an hour. Tender-crisp it's not, but it is certainly delicious.

And most important: "You have to enjoy cooking. If you don't enjoy cooking, I don't care, you're never going to be a good cook."

Those wild mustard greens, gathered in a small lot right around the corner from where they live, can be used in a variety of dishes. Blanched in boiling, salted water to soften their tough texture and take away some of their bitter edge, they might then be folded into an earthy white bean soup, wrapped up in crisp phyllo spanakopita, or added to richly flavored



braised lamb.

Or maybe, best of all, there's the dish Greeks call simply horta (just as Southerners serve a dish called simply "greens"). It couldn't be easier: Blanch the greens, drain them well and put them in a serving bowl. Heat a quarter-cup or so of olive oil in a saucepan until it's really hot and then pour it, sizzling, over the greens. Season with salt and that's it. No garlic, no olives, no yogurt, no spices, but the way the fruity olive oil plays off the fresh, verdant taste of the greens is really remarkable.

Of course, to prepare any of those dishes, you really need wild mustard greens -- spinach, frequently recommended as a substitute, isn't close. Even domesticated mustard greens don't have quite the same texture and flavor.

And to get wild mustard greens, you really need to have an experienced guide, though perhaps not necessarily one as experienced as Alexandra Panousis.

She grew up in Vasiliko, Greece, in the Peloponnesian peninsula, the youngest of 12 children born to a family of grape growers. She came to the United States in 1934 after marrying Jimmy Panousis on the heels of a two-week courtship. Her husband, his father and his brother owned a stand in San Pedro called Coney Island Hot Dogs, and he had gone back to Greece to find a bride. The restaurant was a hot spot, and after World War II, Jimmy went into the real estate business, where he was even more successful.