

# 16th Greek-Serbian Orthodox and Cultural Friendship Day



**“LONG LIVE GREECE!”**

**“LONG LIVE SERBIA!”**

**“LONG LIVE ORTHODOXY AND THE FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN THE GREEKS & THE SERBS!”**

*On the eve of St Dimitrios' 26th October Feast Day, patron saint of Thessaloniki city and of all Macedonia region, northern Greece, the 16th annual Greek-Serbian Orthodox and Cultural Friendship Day took place last Sunday 25th October in the presence of hundreds of members of the Greek and Serbian communities of Sydney, despite the relentless rain in the afternoon.*

This event takes place every spring and it is seen as a means of ever strengthening the already strong bonds between the two communities in Sydney. The event is initiated by the Serbian Orthodox Church-School Community of “St Archdeacon Stefan”, Rooty Hill in western Sydney and has been so since 1994. Its purpose is to demonstrate the Serbian community's expression of appreciation towards Greece, Cyprus, and the Greek Diaspora and of course towards the Greek community of Australia for their invaluable assistance and humanitarian aid towards the Serbian nation during the tragic events in the former Yugoslavia in the early to mid 90's. The multifaceted Greek assistance was noteworthy and non-stop even during the US-led NATO bombing of



Yugoslavia and in particular of Serbia, as Serbia resisted her dismemberment, something that the west was trying to achieve during the break up of the once strong Balkan and south-eastern European country of Yugoslavia. Greece still continues to assist in her own way Serbia, from a sympathetic political stance for her Euro-Atlantic integration as well as from a humanitarian assistance point of view for the children who had been affected by the war. For many years, Serbian children are hosted by Greek families in Macedonia region as well as other areas of Greece, for a short time in summer or winter to ease the pain of the war affected children. The bonds between both nations continues with the presence of thousands of Serbian holiday makers making Greece as their first summer holiday destination the last few years and most of them heading towards the Halkidiki peninsula of Macedonia whilst Belgrade, the capital of Serbia and the rest of the country have



a strong presence of Greek financial companies and offices with millions of euros investments in the country as well as a strong presence of tertiary students in Belgrade's educational institutions.

The 16th annual Greek-Serbian Orthodox and Cultural Friendship Day commenced with the Christian Orthodox liturgy led by Serbian father Srbojub Miletic at the “St Archdeacon Stefan” Serbian Orthodox Church. At midday, the congregation and other guests made their way into the Parish Centre next door for the sumptuous Serbian luncheon with cevapcina, shopska salata, cake delights and other very palatable foods.

The official program commenced with the national anthems of Australia, Greece and Serbia. Dimitrios Kametopoulos, took stage as the Master of Ceremonies for the day in Greek and English as well as in rudimentary Serbian.

Dr Stanko, committee member of the Serbian Orthodox Church-School Community “St Archdeacon Stefan”, Rooty Hill, was introduced by the Master of Ceremonies to welcome everyone on behalf of the Serbian community. In his speech, Dr Stanko stressed the importance of the strong religious, historical, geographical, political and cultural bonds between the Serbian and Greek nations and of course the Serbian and Greek communities of Sydney and Australia. He characteristically said that it was the Hellenes around the world, in Greece, Cyprus and the vast Diaspora that aided the Serbian nation and the orphaned children in the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina during the

tragic war in the Balkans. This culminated with the continued humanitarian efforts by the Hellenes during the late 90's during the devastating bombing of Belgrade, Nis, Kragujevac and other Serbian cities and villages by the US-led NATO military airplanes. The appreciation felt by the Serbian nation and diaspora towards the Greeks is omnipresent and will always exist, emphasised Mr Glisic. He then thanked the co-organisers Dimitrios Kametopoulos and Ljubica Ridley, the Serbian co-ordinator since 1994, for their tireless efforts in the organisation and coordination for the last 16 years of this important event in the communities' calendar.

The cultural program opened with the Serbian dancing group “Ratsko” from the Serbian Orthodox Church-School Community of “St Archdeacon Stefan”, performing traditional Serbian dances. The cultural program continued with more Serbian dancing groups from many local community organisations performing traditional dances from various parts of Serbia, including the regions of Shumadia, Laskovo, Dimitrograd, Vojvodina, Kosovo and other areas. Some of them travelled from Dapto and Wollongong to contribute to the event. Representing the Greek community, the “Cyprus Community Club of NSW Dancing School” in Stanmore performed several Greek dances and in particular characteristic Cyprian dances “transporting” the audience to that part of the Mediterranean and in particular to the beautiful island of Cyprus. The group was applauded many times during its performance. In addition, the 16th annual Greek-Serbian Orthodox and Cultural Friendship Day hosted Valia Gianins-



ka, a Bulgarian-Australian who sang a number of traditional Bulgarian songs from the Pirin area and other places in Bulgaria, adding another Balkan touch to the event. Ms Gianinska is fluent in her native tongue Bulgarian, as well as in Greek, Russian and English and is able to converse in other Yugoslav based languages. The performance of an invited Gypsy group performing characteristic gypsy dances added another touch as well.

Ms Ljubica Ridley, on behalf of the Serbian Orthodox Church-School Community of “St Archdeacon Stefan”, Rooty Hill, presented all dancing groups and performers a frame of the Church as a token of thanks for their participation on the day. The rest of the afternoon was filled with lots of music, Serbian, Greek and Bulgarian providing an opportunity for the young and old to be involved in the dancing off stage. The next Greek-Serbian Orthodox and Cultural Friendship Day for 2010 was announced to be in mid to late September next year. That will be the 17th year and some further additions are scheduled to be included in the program, namely the involvement of the Russian Orthodox and Romanian Orthodox communities in Sydney and their respective dancing groups. Something that can be noted from a Balkan context point of view, is the fact this year's Sydney Greek-Serbian Day coincided with the visit of the ultra-nationalist Prime Minister of the FYROM (Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia) Nikola Gruevski in Sydney making unhistorical claims against Macedonia, northern Greece, in the presence of his emigrant community from the FYROM and the visit of the President of Bulgaria, Georgi Prvanov, on an official business trip to Australia.

*Dimitris Kametopoulos*

