

Chief Editor The Daily Telegraph
Sydney, 27 August 2012

Dear Sir,

It was to my huge discontent, to read Joe Hildebrand's article in Saturday's (25.08.12) The Daily Telegraph titled "Laziness the key to Greek plan for world domination".

First of all because of the very simplifying and, at the same time, distorted way history is presented. The author of the article needs to be reminded that the ancient Macedonians were Greeks as were the Athenians, the Spartans, the Corinthians and so many others as well. And their language was the Greek language as can be easily understood if you look at coins dating at that period. And so were the Byzantines who prevailed at the Eastern part of the Roman Empire after the Romans. Having said that about all the above-mentioned Greeks, it is for others to explain to your journalist who the Romans, the Burgundians, The Catalans, The Florentines, The Venetians and the Turks really were.

The second thing is that by no means did the Greek culture cease to exist 2,500 years ago. The Greek civilization continued until nowadays, it kept evolving, flourishing and offering a lot to the rest of the world. In fact, Joe Hildebrand's very reference to all the other cultures that the Greek culture had an impact on is the proof of its liveability, adaptability, evolving and surviving until today.

Imagine that after all these "hardships", as Joe Hildebrand calls them, and having been a new and independent state for only 60 years, Greece was able to offer and re-introduce to the rest of the world the Olympic Games and the Olympic Spirit. Yes, the first modern Olympics took place in Athens and this is why you saw the Greek flag in the main stadium and you heard the Greek national anthem and the Olympic Song (composed and written by Greeks only 120 years ago) during the recent London Games! Needless to refer to all the Greeks who have thrived in the fields of culture and science during the past century but a few names are really worth mentioning: George Seferis, Odysseas Elytis, George Papanikolaou, Manos Hatzidakis, Mikis Theodorakis, Katina Paxinou, Melina Merkouri, Vangelis etc.

The third thing is Joe Hildebrand's claim of no connection to the past. Apart from the above-listed who provide a sufficient proof of continuity in the Greek culture, it also needs to be mentioned that the pride and having conscience of their heritage is what makes Greeks stand today guardians of our glorious past and present. If it wasn't for modern Greeks, nothing of what Joe Hildebrand admires from our history would still be there. And of course we still know how to create works like the ones of our ancient past, that both showcase and pay tribute to that past: one only needs to visit the recently inaugurated Acropolis Museum (2009) and the modern Metropolitan Rail System - that runs through the biggest part of the underground of Athens, transporting thousands of Greeks and tourists everyday and in fact hosting whole museums in its stations (i.e. Syntagma, Acropolis, Panepistimio, Keramikos) at the same time - to understand what I am talking about.

And all this takes us to the "laziness". Obviously everyone has to admit that it is not only a generalization but also a profound insult. Not because the achievements of modern Greeks are disregarded but because if we were lazy, Joe Hildebrand would not be able to visit and enjoy our hospitality the way he did. This is why I am also sure that the gyros he tried was the best and I hope that his coffee was the way he likes it! And believe me, our generosity is everywhere, from the culture we offer to the rest of the world, to the food and care we offer in abundance to our guests. Perhaps for some it is hard to understand and accept it, but this is how the Greeks were, are and always will be!

As for the figures that prove that we are one of the hardest working populations in the EU, one can easily refer to the OECD relevant data.

Last but not least, Greeks have worked really hard along with the Australians, not only here in Australia to build this beautiful land and life of yours, but also back in our country where that work and task were much tougher since we fought side by side in two World Wars trying to defend our shared values of self-dignity, freedom and democracy. And I think these values and these fights should have made Joe Hildebrand think twice before writing that article the way it was worded.

Best regards,
Nicholas Economidis
Counsellor for Press



Laziness the key to Greek plan for world domination

It is perhaps telling that in more than 3000 years of their history no one ever coined the phrase "Greek efficiency". The reasons for this became clear to me over the past few weeks as I went on a voyage of discovery through the ancient world. My aim was to rechart the course of Western civilisation and find out, in a nutshell, where it all went wrong. The answer, reassuringly, is that it didn't really go wrong at all. Rather, we were all screwed from the start.

My pilgrimage ended in Athens, where 2 1/2 millennia ago the Greeks gave birth to democracy and laid the foundation stone of the Western world. Unfortunately, however, they haven't done much since. Not long after Athens declared itself the cultural capital of the known world it was over-run by uncouth barbarians, namely the Macedonians, who then went on to conquer half of Asia. By way of perspective, it was a bit like if Woollahra had been taken over by the residents of Mt Druitt, who then went on to invade New Zealand.

Not long after that Athens fell to the Romans – also uncouth barbarians – and the Byzantines. Then the Burgundians, the Catalans, the Florentines and (for a brisk seven years) the Venetians, before being conquered by the Turks for about four centuries. All, needless to say, also uncouth barbarians.

Even when Greece was liberated it came with many hardships and many strings attached. But then at last, after century upon century of invasion and occupation, Greece was finally able to bring a great global power to its knees. Unfortunately, that power was the European Union.

However, it is still a formidable achievement that a tiny battered nation has been able to cripple in one fell swoop almost all the countries that have harassed it over the past 2500 years.

And the Greeks did it with the only powerful weapon they have – their indestructible and indefatigable laziness. In truth, this is unfair. It is actually a lethal combination of laziness and generosity the Greeks have used to wage war on such modern evils as, say, manufacturing.

Take, for example, the retail and hospitality sector. Certainly the Greeks are a mercantile culture: they love buying and selling (albeit largely for the companionship of it). What seems to elude them is the concept of profit.

By way of illustration here is a verbatim exchange of me attempting to buy a Justin Bieber T-shirt from a street vendor:

Me: How much is that T-shirt?

Vendor: Normally 20 euro, but for you special price: 17 Me: I'll take it.

Vendor: OK, OK: 15

Likewise if you go to a Greek restaurant they will refuse to bring you the bill, as they fear this would seem impolite. Then, after you finally beg them to hand it over, they pretend to acquiesce and then come back with a football-sized plate of dessert, a pile of watermelon and a small bottle of spirits, no doubt hoping that if they get you drunk enough you'll forget to ask for the bill again. Should you still insist, they will then bring the bill with a hangdog expression on their face, mortally wounded that you could ever want to leave.

Then you look remorsefully at the decadent piles of dishes you've just consumed and brace yourself for the damage, only to discover your 26 plates of gyros cost a total of \$12.50.

Realising how desperately someone needed to inject some money into the economy, I would then attempt to leave an enormous tip and then flee before anyone could stop us. But no sooner have you managed to stand up than they are back at the table offering you free coffee.

Indeed coffee is a significant part of Greek culture, and they have even discovered a way to drink it non-stop all day without seeming to acquire any energy whatsoever.

And that brings us to where we are today: A world where hundreds of millions of people who work hard every day and are already sacrificing the pleasures of family and free time are being held to ransom by a culture of people who do nothing but laze around all day eating and drinking and chatting to each other about everything under the sun.

And we think they're the ones who are backwards.

What uncouth barbarians we are . . .

Author: Joe Hildebrand

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