

Statement of George Tsunis
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Hellenic Republic
U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
January 12, 2022

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and esteemed members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to Greece and I thank Senator Paul and Senator Casey for their introductions. I thank the President and Secretary Blinken for their trust and confidence in me, and I am grateful to this committee for considering my nomination.

But most of all and if you will permit me, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to my parents. They heard Emma Lazarus' calling and immigrated to this country from Greece to build a better life for themselves and our family. My family is cognizant of the fact that if not for the Truman Doctrine, the world's first democracy would have been pulled into the Soviet orbit, and if not the Marshall Plan, Greece would have descended into mass starvation and poverty. I would not be here today were it not for the United States' willingness to provide opportunity for immigrants like my parents and for first-generation Americans like me. I am humbled by the President's nomination and view it as a chance to give back to the country that has given me and my family so much. I would also like to thank my wife Olga and our three children – James, Eleni, and Yanna – who are my bedrock of support. Thanks also to former Senator Alfonse D'Amato, my former boss, who's here to offer moral support. Thank you, Senator.

It is not an exaggeration to say that I have been blessed to live the American dream. After attending law school, I worked in government as an associate in a small law firm and then as a partner in a large firm until I followed my father into business as an entrepreneur when I founded Chartwell Hotels. During my tenure as CEO, Chartwell weathered the recession and experienced unprecedented growth. Having witnessed the strength and resilience of U.S. business in the international marketplace, I understand the importance of expanding our global business and trade. As an executive in the hospitality industry, I also understand how important it is to care for people. If confirmed, my top priority would be to ensure the safety and security of the many Americans who live, work, and travel in Greece.

Throughout my career, I've maintained a strong interest in foreign and economic affairs, and I've had the pleasure of contributing to public policy as a member of the Brookings Institution's Foreign Policy Leadership Committee and as a trustee with the Business Executives for National Security.

If confirmed, I will arrive in Athens at a crucial moment in U.S.-Greece relations. Our relationship is at an all-time high. The annual Strategic Dialogue has helped define the key pillars of the U.S.-Greece relationship, including cooperation on defense and security, law enforcement and counterterrorism, trade and investment, disaster preparedness, energy and climate, and people-to-people ties. Greece continues to make progress on all fronts as it pursues economic revitalization, overcomes the challenges of the pandemic, and grapples with tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean. What happens in Greece matters – not just for Greece, but for the Eastern Mediterranean region, NATO, the European Union, and the United States.

Economic opportunity is vital to the United States and to Greece. If confirmed, my top economic and commercial goals will be to build on efforts to accelerate trade and investment opportunities.

The United States and Greece have made tremendous progress on energy cooperation. If confirmed, I will encourage Greece to continue investing in renewable energy as well as projects important to regional energy security, including the Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria, the Interconnector Greece-North Macedonia, the Alexandroupoli Floating Storage Regasification Unit, and electricity interconnectors that can support both gas and renewable energy sources. We are seeing increased U.S. investment in renewables. I believe there is room for even greater cooperation.

The United States benefits from a strong and growing bilateral defense relationship with our NATO ally, Greece. If confirmed, I will continue to deepen this key relationship. Particularly noteworthy is the long-standing U.S. military presence at Souda Bay on the island of Crete from which the military conducted around 2,500 flights and 143 ship visits in 2021 alone. Our defense relationship has grown significantly over the last five years, including through updates to the Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement and greater training and deployments in Greece.

People-to-people ties form the bedrock of the U.S.-Greece relationship. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing to work with Greek cultural and educational institutions, NGO's, municipalities, individual citizens, and the diaspora to nourish these ties.

Finally, if confirmed, I will work with the outstanding Mission Greece team, in an inclusive manner, to bolster this already strong relationship.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. I welcome your questions.