



TASC Media Watch

March 2019

Response to Chicago Tribune Article, ["Greeks know price, payoff of freedom"](#) Mr. Gunay Evinch, Co-Chair of TASC

Congratulations to Mr. Kass for doing his utmost to keep ancient prejudices alive and well in "Greeks Know Price, Payoff of Freedom". One expects that there is more to being a Greek American than to harbor a grudge dating to the Greek - Turkish War of 1821-30. As any American knows, we do not celebrate the 4th of July by burning the Union Jack or effigies of King George III, or poisoning hearts with hatred against the people of Britain.

So, what accounts for Mr. Kass' diatribe? The Ottoman Empire that ruled from 1299-1919 from Eastern Europe and the Balkans to North Africa, the Caucasus, and Middle East, was based on the "millet" system by which Ottoman citizens were governed by their own religious communities and granted broad autonomy. This is an important reason why Greeks speak Greek today and practice Greek Orthodox Christianity. This also explains in part why the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church continues to serve from and reside in Istanbul.

But we cannot ignore that the break up of the Ottoman Empire, which birthed over 40 countries, was fueled by European fury against Muslims (and Jews). The terrorist who slaughtered 50 Muslims in New Zealand brandished this hatred in his manifesto. My grandparents who had a great life in Skopje, Macedonia, had to flee as the Balkans Christianized after World War I. They found refuge in Izmir, Turkey. They were lucky. Over 4 million Ottoman Muslims and Jews were destroyed or displaced as the Ottoman Empire fell in the Balkans, Caucasus and Anatolia.

My parents immigrated to America in the 1950s and settled in Chicago. Like Mr. Kass' parents, my parents were the children of grocers. I am a second generation Turkish American of Ottoman Macedonian and Albanian heritage. I propose to Mr. Kass, my fellow former Ottoman Greek and now fellow American, that we adopt forgiveness and dialogue based on commonalities that can inspire collaboration for the common interest and appreciation of diversity. America is our shared homeland.