



Seeking Justice for All Greek-Born Adoptees
Presented to the Government of The Hellenic Republic
On Behalf of All Greek-Born Adoptees
by
The Eftychia Project
A 501(c)3 Nonprofit Organization
“Helping Greek Adoptees Find Their Roots”

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Introduction

In the turbulent Cold War decades of the 1950's and 1960's, thousands of Greek children were adopted abroad to foreign countries, primarily the United States of America and the Netherlands. These adoptions, while given the coating of legality by the Greek courts, were mired in scandal and greed, and they were, at the very least, irregular, while some were even illegal. Orphanage directors, lawyers, doctors, nurses and even some priests were involved in sending these children abroad, and unscrupulous middlemen filled their pockets as they dispatched these children with minimal documentation and little hope of ever finding the way back to their homeland. These children had no say in what happened to them --- adults in Greece, the United States and other foreign nations decided their fates for them, stripping them of their families, their culture and their heritage. No longer children, these Greek-born adoptees now are searching for their biological families in ever-growing numbers, yearning for that elusive familial connection and connection to the country of their birth. However, the search often stretches on for decades and the obstacles are formidable.

For years, these adoptions seemed a subject of taboo and only recently have many people in Greece, the United States and the global community become aware of them. For many of these children, the adoption experience was not a happy one. While some can relate stories of loving parents and idyllic childhoods, many have lasting trauma from the effects of emotional, physical and even sexual abuse at the hands of their adoptive families. The Greek state allowed large numbers of these children to be adopted by proxy and with virtually no oversight, with a Greek lawyer serving as the proxy for the adoptive parents before the Court of the First Instance, and the adoptive

parents never having to set foot on Greek soil. In addition, Greece was rocked by scandal in December 1958 when newspaper headlines told of black-market babies, again in 1959 when Stephen Scopas was indicted for selling Greek babies in New York, and a third time in 1964 when the orphanage director of Agios Stylianos and eight of his employees went to trial on charges of baby-selling. Some hospitals and doctors were found to have told mothers that the children they had given birth to had died when, in actuality, they had been given for adoption. In other cases, family members literally took babies from their mother's arms and shuttled them to an orphanage. Greek lawyers cajoled unmarried women into giving their babies up to them for adoption. And orphanage directors often declared children as foundlings in order to assume guardianship and have them enter the adoption pipeline as quickly as possible.

The Greek government has never acknowledged the travesty of these adoptions nor accepted any responsibility for them; neither has it done anything to facilitate the searches of adoptees or their biological families. Rather, the attitudes of the Greek state and the mountainous bureaucracy can only be characterized as indifferent and dismissive. Despite the Greek law passed in 1996, and subsequent laws enacted in 1997 and 1999, that were designed to allow adult adoptees access to and copies of their records, Greek-born adoptees have routinely met with resistance from adoption-related institutions, government agencies and municipalities when asked to provide these records. Instead of providing copies of actual records, some orphanages provide only their own "synopsis" of the adoptee's time in the institution and/or foster care, with no copies of any documents that verify the contents of the synopsis. Other institutions neither return phone calls nor emails, cite the new GDPR as a reason for withholding records, and some have even refused to accept legal power of attorney with an attached apostille on behalf of an adoptee.

Many adoptees struggle with issues of identity and belonging. But the fact is, these adoptees were born in Greece, to Greek parents and through no fault of their own, they were sent away, many of them to non-Greek adoptive parents who never exposed them to Greek people or Greek culture. In fact, some of them never learned they were adopted or even that they were Greek until they were well into adulthood. And upon finding out about their origins, it has driven them to embrace all those things that are an integral part of the Greek identity of which they have been deprived for so many years. Perhaps the most important part of the Greek identity for these adoptees is the restoration of their Greek citizenship, which has always been theirs by right of birth. Each time a celebrity (many of whom have no Greek heritage at all) is gifted with honorary Greek citizenship, it is like a knife in the heart of the Greek adoptee who was actually born in Greece. The love of their homeland is in their blood, and Greece calls to something deep and primal within them.

The attitude of Greeks, especially Greek government employees, toward Greek adoptees seeking their roots and their citizenship that is their birthright is varied. While

some Greeks are supportive, others dismiss their quest out of hand. One adoptee recounts an encounter with a Greek consular employee when seeking guidance on reclaiming her Greek citizenship. The employee was less than helpful and meanly commented, “Why are you doing this? You were raised in the United States, so you really aren’t Greek!” Oh, the irony of someone who was born in Greece to Greek parents being told they really are not Greek! Others have been told that all Greek adoptees have had their Greek citizenship revoked (not true) or that Greek adoptees must go through the naturalization process (also not true), while some consulates have informed adoptees that they do not assist with such citizenship issues and refer them to a Greek attorney. On another occasion, a Greek adoptee, searching for his biological mother on a trip to Greece, encountered an employee in an archive who looked at him, shook her head and said, “Panagia is mother enough for us all.” This lack of compassion and sensitivity, coupled with conflicting information and inconsistency from nearly every consulate, Greek government agency and institution, creates the perfect storm of anger, bitterness, resentment and frustration for the Greek adoptee.

These Greek-born adoptees are indeed “The Lost Children of Cold War Greece” (see the Alpha TV ground-breaking documentary here: https://youtu.be/0h1xbgAYz_c), deprived of the very identity that was bestowed upon them at birth and dismissed by the Greek state that sent them away. They want only what is theirs by right of birth, what those who are not adopted take for granted: a sure sense of identity and belonging, of being an accepted part of the greater community of Greeks in the homeland and in the diaspora, and the permanence of connection through Greek citizenship. It is time – in fact, it is long past time – that the Greek government acknowledges the circumstances surrounding these adoptions and grants these Greek-born adoptees the justice that they deserve and have been so long denied. As so aptly put by MP Stathis Konstantinidis of Kozani, an unwavering supporter of Greek-born adoptees, in a recent speech to the Greek parliament after meeting with The Eftychia Project: “Greece has the responsibility to support these people, who in difficult circumstances were uprooted from their homeland, but not the homeland from their souls, to rediscover their Greek identity and to be recognized as Greek citizens.” Because in the end, these Greek-born adoptees are still those lost children. Children who just want to come home.

What We Believe

- We believe that the knowledge of their roots and their biological family origins are basic human rights of all adoptees
- We believe that Greek-born adoptees and Greek biological families are entitled to transparency from the Greek government and all Greek adoption-related institutions and organizations, public and private
- We believe that Greek-born adoptees are entitled to unfettered access to Greek court, orphanage, institutional and organizational records, public and private, related to their adoptions, as well as their birth records and copies of ALL of their adoption-related documents
- We believe that all Greek-born adoptees are entitled to Greek citizenship by birthright, and that an expedited pathway to Greek citizenship for adoptees should be streamlined, with minimal bureaucratic processes and at no cost to the adoptee
- We believe that Greek-born adoptees and Greek families are entitled to the establishment, with the collaboration of the Greek state, of an adoptee/biological family DNA database for the purpose of reuniting adoptees and their biological families, at no cost to either the adoptee or the biological family

Issues of Justice for Greek-Born Adoptees

Issue #1 – Transparency

Greek-born adoptees were among the first group of foreign children to be adopted en masse by Americans, long before the South Koreans, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Russians. Yet, they have literally been forgotten, dwarfed by the sheer numbers of children from these other countries. For years, it seemed that no one in Greece, particularly no one in the Greek government or any of the Greek adoption-related institutions, wanted to admit these adoptions even happened, let alone acknowledge the travesty of these adoptions and their aftermath or the irregularities and/or illegalities that characterized them. Nor has the Greek government, its adoption-related institutions, its consulates, or its government agencies demonstrated any real desire to provide assistance to or facilitate the searches of Greek-born adoptees. Instead, the general attitude has been generally indifferent and dismissive.

Desired Solution

1. In order to solve this problem, the Greek government must acknowledge that these Greek-born adoptees and their adoptions exist, and that the circumstances surrounding these adoptions have been problematic for more than six decades.
2. The Greek government must acknowledge the tragic circumstances of these adoptions and the life-long trauma suffered by many adoptees, including their struggle with the issues of identity and belonging, and ensure that adoptions such as these never happen again.
3. The Greek government must affirm that the knowledge of their roots and their biological family origins is a basic human right of all Greek-born adoptees.
4. The Greek government must acknowledge that formidable obstacles, including the language barrier, the Greek bureaucracy and inconsistencies in policies between government agencies and adoption-related institutions present often insurmountable difficulties for Greek-born adoptees searching for their roots.
5. The Greek government must work to change the culture and the attitudes of its agencies and adoption-related institutions toward Greek-born adoptees and must actively work to provide assistance to Greek-born adoptees in their searches, providing counseling and other necessary services to both domestic and intercountry Greek-born adoptees.
6. The Greek government must take immediate steps to rectify these problems, which Greek-born adoptees have faced for more than six decades, ensure that all Greek-born adoptees are treated with dignity, respect, sensitivity and compassion by all Greek government officials and employees, and give Greek-born adoptees the justice they deserve and have been so long denied.

Issue #2 – Access to Records

Greek-born adoptees are entitled to access and copies of their Greek court, birth, orphanage, institutional and organizational records, public and private, and any other adoption-related documents. Despite the Greek laws passed in 1996 and 1997 granting access to those records, Greek-born adoptees have routinely met with resistance from adoption-related institutions, government agencies and municipalities when asked to provide these records. Instead of providing copies of actual records, some orphanages provide only their own “synopsis” of the adoptee’s time in the institution and/or foster care, with no copies of any documents that verify the contents of the synopsis. Other institutions neither return phone calls nor emails, wrongly cite the new GDPR as a reason for withholding records, and some have even refused to accept legal power of attorney with an attached apostille on behalf of an adoptee.

Adoptees who actually manage to retrieve records recount horror stories of waiting for up to 12 years to receive them, having to resort to threatening orphanages with media exposure and legal action, sending multiple letters requesting their records and never receiving a response to any of them, and being told there were never any individual records for adoptees and all information is contained in the institution’s ledgers. There has been some suggestion of involving the Greek consulates in America in retrieving records for Greek-born adoptees, but this would only add another layer of bureaucracy between the adoptee and their records and would make a time-consuming process more arduous and time-consuming. Given the previous attitudes of the consulates towards Greek-born adoptees, the role of the Greek consulates should be limited to providing information supportive of Greek-born adoptees and their searches for their roots.

Regarding records, most are contained in physical documents, including orphanage ledgers and individual adoptee files of the various institutions. The vast majority are not preserved digitally, and therefore, the files are not searchable. This requires someone to physically go to the place the files are stored and search for the records when they are requested by an adoptee. And as the years pass, these records deteriorate, becoming brittle and fragile. Soon these records will crumble, and there will be no records for the older adoptee to retrieve. And for the older Greek-born adoptees, the clock is ticking. They are now in their 50’s, 60’s, 70’s – their biological parents in their 70’s, 80’s and 90’s. These adoptees are fast running out of time to find their biological parents still alive.

Desired Solution

1. The Greek government must immediately establish an initiative to digitize all orphanage ledgers and files, as well as any other adoption-related records.

2. A directive must be issued by the appropriate ministry to orphanages, PIKPA and all adoption-related institutions that:
 - a. All orphanages, PIKPA and adoption-related institutions must adhere to the Greek laws of 1996, 1997 and 1999
 - b. All orphanages, PIKPA and adoption-related institutions and organizations must provide to adoptees copies of all documents and any other relevant materials contained in their files, including copies of the ledger entry and any notes left with them when they were relinquished.
 - c. All orphanages, PIKPA and adoption-related institutions and organizations must respond to an adoptee's request for records and provide said records within a reasonable amount of time after the request is received, within a maximum of 6-8 weeks, preferably sooner.
 - d. All orphanages, PIKPA and adoption-related institutions and organizations cannot provide only a "synopsis" of the adoptee's history. If a synopsis is provided, it must be accompanied by copies of all documents and relevant materials contained in the adoptee's file.
 - e. All orphanages, PIKPA and all adoption-related institutions and organizations must accept a legal power of attorney (POA) written in English accompanied by the appropriate apostille if an adoptee chooses to designate a representative to request and receive records on their behalf, whether in person or by other accepted means. It is the policy of the Genika Archeia Kratous (GAK) to accept these POAs and have them translated by the foreign office if it is deemed necessary. The policy should be the same for all orphanages, PIKPA and all adoption-related institutions and organizations.
3. Prior to the composition of this document, the Eftychia Project had the honor of meeting with Ms. Eleni Apousidou, Head of Department, Fosterage and Adoption, Directorate of the Protection of Children and Family, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Greece. As a result of the meeting and in consultation with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, Ms. Apousidou's department will begin work on a centralized process for Greek-born adoptees to request and receive their records. It was estimated that it would take approximately 2-3 months to write and implement the process. However, no further word has been received from Ms. Apousidou on the progress of this endeavor.

Issue #3 – Greek Citizenship for All Greek-Born Adoptees

Greek citizenship is undeniably the birthright of all Greek-born adoptees. They were born in Greece, to Greek parents, and through no fault of their own, they were sent away, with Greek passports that declared they were Greek citizens born in Greece. They were stripped of their families, their culture, their language and their heritage. Most adoptees struggle with issues of identity and belonging, and for decades these adoptees have been deprived of the Greek identity. They want only what is theirs by right of birth, what those who are not adopted take for granted: a sure sense of identity and belonging, of being an accepted part of the greater community of Greeks in the homeland and in the diaspora, and the permanence of connection through Greek citizenship.

Desired Solution

1. The Greek state must acknowledge that all Greek-born adoptees are entitled to Greek citizenship by right of birth.
2. The Greek state must take immediate steps to restore Greek citizenship to its “lost children.”
3. The process of restoration of Greek citizenship to Greek-born adoptees must be a clear, simple, expedited path at no expense to the adoptee.
4. The Greek Nationality Code itself provides the all the necessary evidence that Greek-born adoptees are entitled to Greek citizenship in Article 1 of its First Article:

LAW 3284

Ratification of the Greek Nationality Code

THE PRESIDENT OF THE HELLENIC REPUBLIC

We hereby issue the following law passed by Parliament:

First Article

The Greek Nationality Code, as compiled by the Committee constituted under article 18 (22) (d) of Law 2503/1997 (Government Gazette 107/A') by resolution 1529/14 Jan 2003 of the Minister of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization, is hereby ratified as follows:

"GREEK NATIONALITY CODE"

CHAPTER A - ACQUISITION OF GREEK NATIONALITY

I. By birth

Article 1

1. The child of a Greek father or mother shall acquire the Greek nationality by birth.
2. A person born in Greek territory shall acquire the Greek nationality by birth, provided that such person does not acquire any foreign nationality by birth or is of unknown nationality.

All Greek-born adoptees should be covered by either one or both provisions of Article 1. All of these adoptees were born in Greece, presumably to a Greek mother. But even if any of these adoptees were born to a non-Greek mother in Greece, then they should be covered by the second provision.

Those adoptees born in Greece and sent for adoption abroad did not acquire a foreign nationality at birth, as would be the case for a child born to foreign parents abroad. For those adopted to the US, they could not begin the process to acquire a foreign nationality/US citizenship until they had been in the US for at least 24 consecutive months. Only then could their adoptive parents petition for their naturalization. While some parents immediately filed at the conclusion of the 24-month period, others waited until the child was older. Therefore, from the time of their adoptions until the time of their naturalization, these adoptees were still citizens of Greece.

5. The proof of the Greek citizenship of Greek-born adoptees and the affirmation that they were indeed born in Greece is in one simple document that many adoptees still possess: the Greek passport they were issued when they left Greece for their new adoptive homes. These passports were issued by the Greek state and declared that these adoptees were of the Greek nationality and that they were born in Greece. No further proof should be needed to establish their right to citizenship.
6. For all Greek-born adoptees who still possess their Greek passport from the time of their adoptions, the Greek state must accept these passports as proof of Greek citizenship. These passports, along with the documents that prove the adoptee's adoption (adoption decree, documentation of name changes, birth records if available), must be accepted by the Greek state and the Greek state must issue a merida for the adoptee in the adoptee's current name. For those adoptees who have reconnected with their Greek biological families, the merida can be issued where the biological family has its registration. For those who have not found their biological families or who may never determine who their biological families are (due to lack of documentation, DNA or otherwise), the Greek state is encouraged to issue a merida in the adoptee's current name from the city or municipality from which the adoptee was adopted. For example, if the adoptee was adopted from the Patras Foundlings Home, the merida should be issued in Patras. The Greek state must acknowledge that all Greek-born adoptees are entitled to Greek citizenship by right of birth.
7. Once a clear path to Greek citizenship is established for Greek-born adoptees, this path must be included in the Greek Nationality Code specifically for Greek-born adoptees so there is no question of this birthright of Greek-born adoptees in the future.
8. It is requested that, in a separate act, the Greek state, through Parliament, immediately restore Greek citizenship to all Greek-born adoptees of the Cold War period – the decades of the 1950's and 1960's – whose adoptions were mired in scandal. This might be accomplished by a declaration of Parliament, with all those named in the declaration receiving their Greek citizenship. There could be a period of some months prior to the issuance of the declaration to allow all those adoptees from the Cold War period who desire Greek citizenship to submit their proof of adoption from Greece and supporting documentation so that citizenship might be granted in their current names. These adoptees are Greeks and no one can ever take that from

them. But justice would be served with an official, tangible acknowledgement of their Greek nationality and identity from the Greek state that sent them away. An acknowledgement that they have, at last, been welcomed home as Greek citizens.

Issue #4 – A Collaborative DNA Database

For those Greek-born adoptees with little or no documentation, DNA may be their only hope of reconnecting with their biological families. This is also true in the cases of Greek biological families, who may have either willingly relinquished a child for adoption or suspect their child was taken from them, as Greek law does not allow these families the right to search or access to records. The Eftychia Project already has in place a DNA test distribution program, begun in July 2020, whereby DNA kits are supplied for free to Greek biological families and adoptees in need. The Eftychia Project has traveled to all parts of Greece in this effort. The program has already been successful in reuniting adoptees and biological families. The Eftychia Project recently began a collaboration with MyHeritage DNA company after MyHeritage became aware of The Eftychia Project's work in Greece distributing DNA kits free of charge. The Eftychia Project would like to collaborate with the Greek state by building upon our existing DNA database.

Desired Solution

1. The Greek state will agree to collaborate with The Eftychia Project, building upon their existing DNA database for Greek-born adoptees and Greek biological families. The specifics of this collaboration can be worked out in detail at a mutually agreed upon date and time.
2. Both Greek-born adoptees and Greek biological families often cannot afford a DNA test. Therefore, the Greek state, for its part in this collaboration, should purchase DNA tests from MyHeritage DNA and The Eftychia Project will continue to supply these DNA tests free of charge to Greek-born adoptees and Greek biological families who request DNA tests.
3. The Eftychia Project will continue to travel across Greece to distribute and administer these DNA tests.
4. The Greek state should also supply monetary support, in the form of an annual grant or by other means, to help with the expenses of promoting and administering these DNA tests and maintaining the database, including but not limited to, compensation for an assistant to oversee the maintenance of the database and deliver results, travel (food, transportation, fuel and lodging), office supplies, post office box, etc.

Conclusion

It is time – indeed, it is long past time – for the Greek state to acknowledge the questionable adoptions of its lost children. To accept responsibility for the lack of oversight that led to some of its children being placed in homes abroad with unsuitable and often abusive parents. To heal the wounds of the past by actively working to support the searches of Greek adoptees and Greek biological families. To ensure access for all Greek-born adoptees to all of their adoption and birth records and to ensure consistency between all adoption-related institutions and government agencies in how these records are requested and distributed. To provide counseling and other adoption-related services for domestic as well as Greek-born intercountry adoptees searching for their roots. To participate in a collaborative DNA database for the purpose of reuniting adoptees with their Greek biological families. To grant Greek citizenship to Greek-born adoptees and restore their Greek identity to them. And above all, to ensure that adoptions, such as those in the Cold War period, NEVER happen again in our beloved Greece. Restore what Greek-born adoptees, particularly those from the Cold War period, have lost – their families, their culture, their heritage – it can only mean your gain. For you will gain a lost generation of proud Greek citizens who want nothing more than to just come home, and who will pass on their love of Greece and its people for generations to come.