

The two Coast Guards

You believe it or not our extraordinary country is the top player in the art of international sea trade.

On the other hand Greeks abroad prosper in business and in social prominence, so the questions arise :

- i) Why do we excel abroad but we do fail in our own land?
- ii) Can we afford democracy?

Greece is a country blessed by nature and geography, inhabited by a witty people, governed by parties and members, mindful for their own political careers, casually playing with people's lives.

Coming back to our marine jewel, I regret to say that the Greek state never bestowed a dignified tribute to the industry where so few offered so much to so many, for so long. As Greek mariners since 10.000 years b.t.d. are plying the seas, reaping progress, prosperity and glory for this country. Seafarers, the vessels and ... good luck make up our great industry.

Once upon a time the third factor was the Greek state with the proper Shipping Ministry, which 2 years ago was considered superfluous and broken up into pieces in the name of modernization ... Since then, instead of shipping policy, good luck remains the third factor. The Hellenic Coast Guard (H.C.G.), it was decided, should abstain from any involvement with shipping policy matters, restrained into the marine police duties, in imitation of the U.S.C.G. model.....

But the political geniuses who conceived the simplistic - to say the least - idea, they very few knew about this legendary U.S.C.G., and they knew nothing about the leading part this service played in forming and promoting the terms of a national economy, of a maritime policy, and at the same time, enforcing law and order at sea.

It's most interesting - (and didactic nonetheless...), to follow on first steps of the newborn American nation and its strong will to stand erect and look ahead.

On April 30, 1789, a strong wind of radical change blew with President Washington's inauguration. A federal system for justice, would be established, insuring domestic tranquility, providing for the national defense, and welfare, and securing the blessings of liberty to Americans. The men destined to begin the work of translating these lofty ideals into reality faced the arduous task of determining initial policies. Men of drive and foresight were needed for such work, and the young American state was fortunate to boast many talented citizens on whom it

could depend. Thomas Jefferson was assigned as Secretary of State the Revolutionary comrade, Alexander Hamilton, known in those days as “a lion of Federalism” took charge of the heaviest burden. He assumed responsibility for the Economy. Next to Washington himself, Hamilton was to become the most influential statesman in the whole administration, for his was the hand fated to draw the pattern of America’s early economic growth. The federal government’s first Coast Guard functions sprang from Hamilton’s bold economic plan.

Industrial independence was considered pivotal in guaranteeing the political independence which the Revolution had already won. Even Jefferson, ever hopeful of preserving in the United States a predominantly rural economy, admitted that “manufacturers are as necessary to our independence as to our prosperity.” But in 1790 the country was woefully weak in industries. Under British rule, American manufactures had been restricted; **current theory held that colonies exist only to provide raw materials for the mother country and to consume her manufactured goods.** During the Revolution, a number of small industries (including munitions plants necessary to defense) had sprung up in the American colonies and flourished for a time, but cessation of hostilities brought disaster to many of these wartime enterprises as Britishers, seeking to retain their economic foothold, flooded the country with cheap articles produced under England’s advanced industrial system and drove out American goods. In 1791, when Hamilton advocated **protectionism** in his famous *Report on Manufactures*, American industry was truly in its infancy, and protection was indubitably to the long-range national benefit. After 1792, for many years, the tariff had a protective bias, a factor of extreme importance in the country’s industrial development.

The American merchant marine, a mainstay of colonial economy was desperately weakened by losses in the war, should be given a chance to develop and prosper. This aim was achieved by making customs duties **discriminatory** (that is, lower on goods imported in American ships). Further, discriminatory tonnage tax rates that virtually excluded alien vessels from the coastwise trade likewise were adopted.

But competition from alien vessels was not the only hazard to the growth of seaborne trade, there were other dangers against which suitable preventive measures should be taken. Hamilton

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in this vein proposed the establishment of a lighthouse service to protect shipping from the hazards of rocks and shoals, **“for rendering the navigation thereof easy and safe”** as the Act of Congress provided.

Another practical move sprung from Hamilton’s realization that the tariff, on which he pinned so much of his hope for the nation’s economic future, would not command universal support. Aliens were not expected to be particularly eager to pay the customs revenue, and the Secretary evidently suspected that even among American merchants there might be a **“fraudulent few against whose free-trading proclivities it would be well to set every possible guard”**. Hamilton was an adherent to free trade but under rules on the other hand it was obvious to him that smuggling could not be suppressed simply by paper statutes: **“the Treasury needed a strong right arm”**. He therefore sought and, on August 4, 1790, obtained from Congress authority to launch a seagoing military force in further support of the national economic policy. This service became the nucleus of the United States Coast Guard.

The organic Act called for “the establishment and support of ten cutters” for the purpose of enforcing customs laws. But Hamilton anticipated an expansion of this small fleet both in size and function, and it was possibly for this reason that he urged Congress to create the professional corps of commissioned officers. **(To give the officers military rank, said he, “would attach them to their duty by a nicer sense of honor”)**. The basic Act authorized the appointment of 40 officers – a master, first, second, and third mate for each cutter – who constituted the corps “Revenue Marine” (R.M), which evolved into the U.S.A.C.G. Their initial title was Officers of the R.M., an ensign and pennant, a distinctive marine uniform and pay scales were established by the 1970 law. The R.M. officers were invested with the authority, legal powers and immunities requisite to accomplish their three fold duties:

- i) Implementing a national shipping policy in line with Hamilton’s goal to protect and facilitate home commerce and production.
- ii) Promoting marine safety, carry out search and rescue operations and enhance regional stability in support of the National Security and defense.
- iii) Law enforcement at sea.

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Between 1825 and 1832 a number of naval officers had been commissioned in the Revenue Marine whose title so remained until supplanted by the “USA Coast Guard” in 1915.

The corresponding Hellenic service was established by the new born Greek state in 1828, and it was handily dismantled in its 181st birth day. This service was titled Hellenic Port Corps (H.P.C.) and its duties were similar to those of the U.S.A.C.G., save the fact that our maritime activities need the support of our state and the H.P.C. had a critical part on that.

Now the H.C.G. is a marine police force, because some had the idea that they so were copying the U.S.A.C.G. !...

The aforementioned questions remains to be answered:

- i) Greeks prosper far from the “affectionate” hand of a hardly constituted state.
- ii) This question should be amended to :
Can we cherishingly afford any regime? ..

S. Ranis