

for the freedom of cool Aegean waters while trapped in the dried-blood dungeons of military dictatorship".¹⁵

Growing international criticism of the Greek junta added to the strain on Canada-Greece relations. By the fall of 1969, the Greek regime was charged with frequently violating human rights and engaging in acts of torture against its civilian population. Within a year, Greece had been suspended from the Council of Europe, a strategy that – in Canadian eyes – “failed to secure any improvement in the lot of the Greek people and in hastening Greece’s return to democracy”.¹⁶ Canada rejected similar protests that called for Greece’s suspension from NATO. However, standing by Athens was getting tougher all the time, Canadian officials bristling at having to deny the celebrated Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis the chance to write music for a Stratford stage production in response to official Greek protests.¹⁷

The Canadian government could no longer withhold comment on Greek affairs and was forced to act in the spring of 1970. On May 22, Pierre Trudeau’s secretary of state for external affairs, Mitchell Sharp, rose to his feet in the House of Commons. Speaking with great care and deep conviction, the veteran minister lamented the human rights violations occurring in Greece and the Greek government’s failure to suppress them. Sharp added his hope that the “[Greek] Government will take [our views] into account in carrying out its declared intention to restore democratic freedoms in Greece”.¹⁸ The measured criticism infuriated the Greek government, resulting in a period of considerable strain between the two nations punctuated by sniping, mutual condemnation, and bitterness.

Return to Normalcy

Discredited internationally and divided internally, Greece’s military junta finally collapsed in 1974 when the country held its first democratic elections in over a decade. Canada embraced the opportunity to encourage Greece back towards democracy and to welcome it again into the international community. Aware of the fragility of the fledgling democracy, Canada moved quickly to recognize the new democratic regime that in its early months stared down 300 military officers threatening to stage a second military coup. In 1976, Canadian officials invited Greek Foreign Minister Dimitrios Bitsios to Ottawa for a two-day visit “intended to mark the return to normalcy in [Canadian] relations with Greece now that democratic government has been restored in Athens”.¹⁹ By the end of the year, Canadian