

39 Mottram Old Road  
Stalybridge  
Cheshire  
SK15 2TF  
UK

Tel: +44 7986 476336  
Email: [bgmackie@hotmail.com](mailto:bgmackie@hotmail.com)

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Vrontisso Life  
Executive secretary  
Green party  
14 Freedom Square  
10553  
Athens  
Greece

Dear Mr Life

**Greece – a beautiful country, marred by concrete and litter**

After a recent trip to Rhodes, I felt it important to write to in connection with some issues:

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to visit Greece and the islands on a number of occasions, and love many things the country has to offer.

However, there are a number of issues that threaten to destroy your beautiful land, if not dealt with decisively. While, I am aware the country is experience economic crisis, perhaps there is still opportunity for appropriate action to be taken.

**Litter**

Firstly, I noticed a lot of litter everywhere, particularly at the side of the road and on undeveloped or rural land, a lot of it seems to have been there for some time. The problem seems to be significantly exacerbated by the wheelie bins used for refuse collection, which often overflow and are accessed by feral cats, spreading litter further afield to be left to build up.

Of course, while this is an issue which affects all residents adversely, it is of particular concern in tourist areas, an industry that is very important to Greece's economic prosperity. Of course, most important also to the long term health of Greece's natural environment – marine and terrestrial.

The question is what can be done about this? Some suggestions could include:

- ▲ More control/monitoring of local councils refuse services, frequency and thoroughness of collection and litter clearance. Rewards for meeting (higher) standards. Fines for not meeting standards.
- ▲ Tougher penalties on littering (for example, like Singapore) of individuals, land owners and businesses.
- ▲ Reporting system where local residents, owners of neighbouring property can report littering on nearby ,or adjacent land.
- ▲ Accessible legal mechanisms for land owners to prosecute neighbouring owners or businesses causing littering.
- ▲ Legal mechanisms to force land owners to clear litter, or face fines and in extreme cases,

- compulsory land purchase by government, the cost of clearance deducted from sale price.
- ▲ Increases education and awareness about environmental issues and protection within schools, businesses and the community.
- ▲ Encouragement/grants/prizes in different categories, e.g. for cleanest homes, businesses, towns.
- ▲ Encouragement/grants/prizes for local volunteer groups to clear litter from areas of natural beauty.
- ▲ More widespread use of recycling – see below.

## **Recycling**

Like many countries, it is clear that more can be done in Greece to increase recycling. The benefits of this are several fold:

- ▲ Reduced litter
- ▲ More efficient use of resources
- ▲ Additional revenues from recycled materials
- ▲ Reduction of land fill

Personally, I think it should be every country's goal to move towards a zero-land fill policy, where virtually everything that cannot easily be broken down by nature is recycled. In order to achieve this, a variety of actions would be required, some straight forward, some requiring some significant policy change and impact on business and community. Such recommendations could include:

- ▲ Replacement of standard wheelie bins for refuse collection with a series of coloured bins for different categories of refuse and more regular daily collections of each type, e.g. organic, metal, paper, plastic, etc.
- ▲ Local recycling facilities for residents and reward schemes for recycling, e.g. tokens for compost/flower seeds or other more locally relevant natural products, for example.
- ▲ Differentiated plastic recycling, including incineration of non-recyclable plastic – to prevent any plastic entering land fill and also possibly generating power/electricity via heat by product.
- ▲ Strict control of use and replacement of plastic packaging and re-introduction of more environmentally friendly systems e.g. reusable glass bottle for water and soft drinks. Review of food packaging to reduce and replace plastic packaging where practical, for biodegradable alternatives, e.g. waxed paper.

## **Development and construction**

As in a number of Mediterranean countries, including Spain and Malta, it is clear that there is a significant use of steel reinforced concrete in the construction of houses and commercial buildings in Greece.

Furthermore, it is also apparent that there is still widespread, possibly uncontrolled development.

In combination, without significant changes, these issues will over time contribute to a number of aesthetic and structural issues, ultimately adversely affecting the cultural integrity of Greece.

Where ever you go in Greece, it is possible to see many concrete shells being constructed, often abandoned mid-development, as well as seemingly completed properties with unsightly metal rods protruding from the roof. My understanding of the latter issue is that it more easily enables extension to another level, previously being used as a way of avoiding taxation.

Whatever the real reason, clearly this practice has to stop to prevent the whole of the country looking like a permanent building site.



Secondly, while it might seem cheaper to construct buildings using steel reinforced concrete, in the long term, it will more likely cost more money than using alternative, or more traditional building methods. Steel and concrete really don't suit Mediterranean climates. The heat and humidity ultimately cracks the concrete, rusts the metal and causes the building to rot from the inside. Within a relatively short number of years, such buildings will require significant maintenance or demolition.

Furthermore, such buildings are not very practical for the climate from a human perspective, thin walls being less capable of keeping the interior cool, resulting in increased reliance on air condition and use of electricity. Then, there's the questionable performance in earthquakes.

However, most importantly of all, such buildings are often ugly and denigrate the existing cultural heritage of Greece and the existing traditional building and landscapes. What kind of legacy are the modern Greeks leaving for their descendants and how do you think your ancestors would view what is being done today?

There are a number of historically significant areas that seem to be slowly under threat, with more and more modern development creeping in. Over time, this will simply create yet more non-descript concrete resorts. For example, Pefkos, a relatively low key resort on Rhodes, will soon become yet another overdeveloped sprawl, if development continues. This area is worryingly close to the historically and architecturally important Lindos, which seems to be experiencing modern development too. This must be controlled, not just in these areas, but throughout Greece – not only to protect the cultural heritage, but ultimately the long term health of the tourism industry.

Ultimately, tourists want to go somewhere nice, not somewhere that's over developed and full of litter. Ultimately, when this happens, tourists will leave in the search for new destinations.

Thankfully, this pattern seems not to be the case everywhere. For example I took great delight on my trip to Simi. I was amazed at the architecture and colours and the fact that those living and working there clearly seemed to appreciate the need to restore and maintain such a beautiful island – a role model for conservation.

Therefore, in summary, solutions must include:

- ▲ Stronger planning controls on new development, particularly in areas of outstanding natural beauty, cultural and historical heritage
- ▲ Vigorous control on the use of steel reinforced concrete in all new developments, ideally banning this technique completely.
- ▲ New regulations requiring all completed prior steel reinforced buildings, or those not actually in active development to remove all protruding spikes within a specified period of time, e.g. six months. Penalties for failure to comply.
- ▲ New standards and requirements for construction, based on more traditional architecture and building techniques, everywhere, but particularly in sensitive areas. Materials to include cut stone, tiles and wood.

I trust this feedback and suggestions are useful and I do hope that Greece can move forward, not only with building a stronger economy, but by addressing the issues raised.

Yours sincerely



Bruce Mackie

