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**Macedonia**

**Bulgaria**

**Turkey**

**Albania**

Thessaloniki

*Mt. Olympus* ▲

*Pindus Mountains*

*Ionian Islands*

*Sporades Is.*

*Aegean Sea*

**Turkey**

*Gulf of Corinth*

Athens

Patras

Piraeus

**Peloponnese**

*Cyclades Is.*

*Ionian Sea*

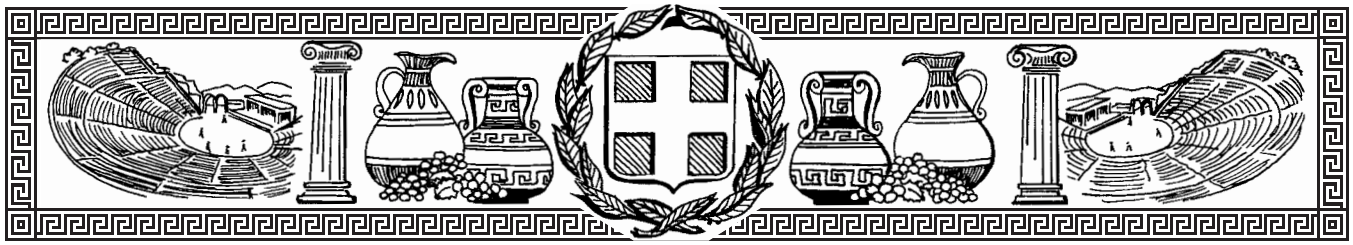
*Dodecanese Is.*

**Rhodes**

*Mediterranean Sea*

**Crete**

**GREECE**



# Greece

The Republic of Greece has been an independent nation since the early nineteenth century. However, Greek civilization is over 5000 years old. Ancient Greeks developed the first democratic government, in which all citizens had a voice in passing laws and choosing leaders. They also invented branches of science and mathematics and wrote the world's earliest plays. Modern Greece began in 1830 after Greek soldiers won the final war in a long-standing conflict with the Ottoman Turks. Greece later expanded its northern border and concentrated on promoting economic growth. As a result, the country's standard of living continues to rise.

**Official Name**—Hellenic Republic (*Elliniki Dimokratia*)

**Area**—50,944 square miles (131,944 square kilometers). Islands make up one-fifth of the land. Crete is the largest; others include Mykonos, Corfu, and Naxos.

**Population**—9,372,000. 65% is urban; 35% is rural.

## Major Cities

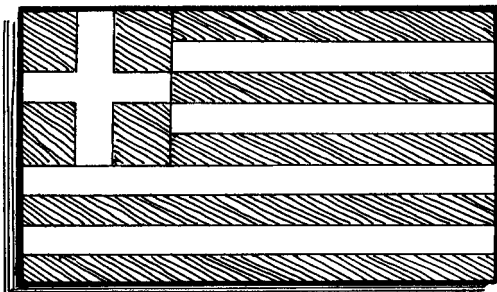
*Athens*, the capital and largest city.

*Piraeus*, leading port city.

*Salonika (Thessaloniki)*, the second largest city.

**Government**—Democratic Republic.

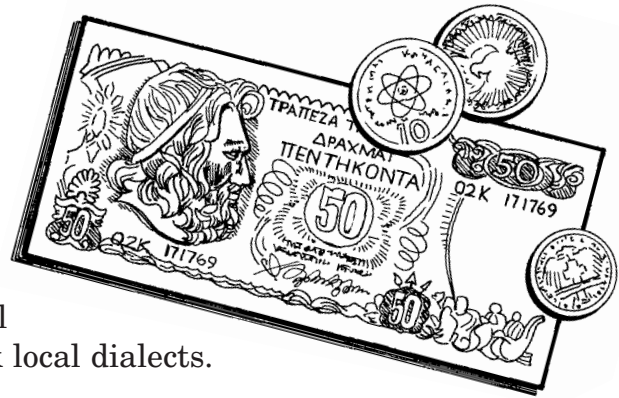
**Climate**—Southern Greece, Crete, and the Aegean Islands have long, dry summers and mild, rainy winters, while northern Greece has a temperate climate. Western Greece receives the most rainfall. Mountain peaks are often covered with snow in winter.



**Elevation**—The highest peak is Mount Olympus in central Greece at 9,570 ft. (2,917m). The early Greeks believed the gods lived on Olympus.

**Flag**—Five blue and four white horizontal stripes with a white cross on a blue square in the top left corner. The blue stripes stand for the sea and the sky, while the white stripes represent the Greek struggle for independence.

**Currency**—The *drachma* is the basic monetary unit. One drachma equals 100 lepta. Drachmas are divided into units of 2, 5, 10, 20, and 50. An average exchange rate is 200 drachmas to one U.S. dollar.



**Language**—Most Greeks speak Demotic Greek, which became the official language in 1977. In villages some speak local dialects.

**Religion**—Approximately 95% of the population belong to the Greek Orthodox Church. Others are Roman Catholics, Jews, Protestant Christians, and Muslims.

**National Anthem**—*Imnos pros tin Eleftherian* (Hymn to Liberty)

## Physical Features

Greece lies in southern Europe and covers the southernmost part of the Balkan Peninsula. Its northern border is formed by Albania, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria. Turkey, on the eastern shore of the Aegean Sea, stretches from northern Greece south to Crete, the country's largest island. On the west coast the Ionian Sea separates Greece from southern Italy. Mountains which form part of the Alpine range stretch from northwest to southeast Greece.

The land is loosely divided into four areas: Northern, Central, Southern, and the islands. The high mountains that dominate the mainland have poor, infertile soil and rocky terrain formed from limestone and sandstone. The Pindus Mountains begin at the northern border and extend the length of the eastern border. In the northwest are the Grammos Mountains, but the highest peak is Mount Olympus in central Greece. While the mountain barriers protected the country from northern invasions, they also isolated the Greeks from each other. This helps to explain why ancient Greece was composed of many independent city-states, rather than being united by a central government.

The long, narrow Gulf of Corinth separates the Peloponnesus from the rest of the Greek mainland. The modern Corinth Canal, completed in 1893, was built to connect the Gulf of Corinth and the Saronic Gulf. In ancient times, the Greeks dragged their boats over land from one sea to another. Delphi, an ancient sanctuary dedicated to the god Apollo, is situated on the slopes of Mt. Parnassus high above the Gulf of Corinth on the mainland.

The largest plains are Macedonia, Thessaly, and Thrace, which are all near the Aegean Sea. Thessaly in particular has many fertile fields, and is considered the breadbasket of a country where only thirty percent of the land can support crops.

The geological rumblings which created the islands continue to cause earthquakes throughout the country. Islands in the Aegean and Ionian Seas are actually peaks of