

**A Service of Thanksgiving for the Life of His Majesty King
Constantine of the Hellenes at
St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle on
Tuesday 27th February, 2024
Memorial Address by
The Rt Hon The Lord Soames of Fletching**

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, and all those who have gathered together here today.

It is indeed a great and humbling honour which has been entrusted to me to say a few words about His Late Majesty King Constantine of the Hellenes to this congregation of his beloved family and friends in this most beautiful and historic Chapel.

I am very conscious that there are many people here today who will have known King Constantine for longer and far more closely than did I and I hope therefore that I do not stamp on their memories.

But today, even as this congregation at which we are gathered to give thanks for, and to commemorate his life, there can be no passing over the sorrow we all feel that such a dear man has been taken from us.

To his loving and devoted family I would like to just to say this. All of us here know that words are broken back things, and to them in their grief, we his friends can only hold out our hands and our hearts with our love and support.

I have, of course, pondered deeply about what I should say today. It is difficult to know where to start but, the fact that this Service is being held in St George's Chapel, is indeed indicative of the very close family relationship that the Late King and his family have with the British Royal Family.

I know that King Constantine was deeply appreciative and grateful to our Late Queen and of course to Prince Philip, for years of friendship, kindness and hospitality in the United Kingdom, and of course the very personal, close and affectionate relationship that he had with His Majesty King Charles. Indeed, King Constantine would have been very touched and proud that the Second Reading we heard this morning was given by his godson, His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales.

And I know that he would have particularly wanted everyone here to wish His Majesty King Charles well and a speedy recovery and that all our best wishes and affection for him and for Her Majesty Queen Camilla go out from here in full and generous measure.

I know, therefore, that King Constantine's family are profoundly grateful for this continued close relationship.

His love for Queen Anne-Marie for over 59 years of marriage, repaid so handsomely by her in her loving loyalty and support to him in good times and in bad times, and through thick and thin, and his deep love and pride in his five children and nine grandchildren was the very bedrock of his life.

He was very good with and greatly enjoyed the company of the young, exemplified in particular in his work for the world of education. He created the Round Square Conference at Gordonstoun, a student-run programme which now operates in over 100 schools in six continents.

He started the Hellenic College of London and always liked discussing ideas and thoughts on the education and the training of the young.

His schooling and later his Service as an Officer in the Army, Navy and Air Force of his Country, led him to understand deeply the concepts of discipline, self-reliance, teamwork and responsibility.

These qualities also served him in very good stead in his love of sport. He was rated an excellent skier, and incidentally the holder of a black belt at karate, and of course most of all he carried all before him in the 1960 Olympics when, as a true Olympian, he won a Gold medal for his Country for yachting in the Dragon Class. A moment of the greatest pride for him, for his family and for his Country.

He was the very essence of an Olympian and one can only imagine how proud he must have been at the opening of the Rome Olympics when he bore the Greek flag in front of his nation's whole team. This was a golden and very important moment in his life and for many years subsequently he went on to be an honorary member of the International Olympic Committee.

I think that there can be no doubt that he played a significant role in securing the Olympics for Greece in Athens in 2004.

Whilst living in Britain he greatly enjoyed English country sports and in particular he was a good shot and had many sporting friends.

I was privileged to shoot quite often with King Constantine at Sandringham when we were both guests of the King. He really was wonderful company; he had a marvellous sense of humour,

was almost devoid of pomposity and always enjoyed good jokes and good company and put up with great equanimity with quite a lot of respectful teasing.

He enjoyed English Club Life – be it Wimbledon, Queens, Whites, The Royal Yacht Squadron, The Royal Thames and of course the old Annabel's. He was a staunch supporter of the lunches of the Saints and Sinners Club where he and the then Prince of Wales exchanged jokes across the table with each other.

He was by nature a gregarious man and was very much at ease wherever he was and whoever he was with.

So today we can all of us reflect on the legacy of a man who despite living through times of great upheaval and personal challenge continued to devote himself as best he could to the service of his Country and its people. King Constantine's unwavering commitment to Greece and his dedication to the welfare of his fellow citizens will always be remembered with great respect.

Born into a life of duty, King Constantine shouldered the responsibilities of Royalty with a sense of purpose and compassion. His reign marked a period of the most profound and difficult change for Greece which presented huge personal challenges for him. All these trials he faced with courage and fortitude.

Throughout his life he showed remarkable strength in adversity and remained at all times absolutely steadfast in his belief in the potential of Greece and its people and in all that he did, he was deeply proud of his Country and did everything within his power and his situation to be a constructive help and support.

After the tragic events of 1967 he resolved always to steer away from potential conflicts within his own Country, as a result of which he and Queen Anne-Marie and their family lived outside Greece for 40 years, but were deeply happy and contented that they were able to return to his beloved Country for the last 10 years of his life.

In all that time his overwhelming interest and concern was always for the good of his people.

I always found King Constantine to be very well informed on the ebb and flow of international events. He had a wide and eclectic circle of friends who covered many of his interests. He had the opportunity to meet many of the World Leaders of the 20th Century. From Churchill to all the United States' Presidents from John F Kennedy to President Bush. He was close to President Mandela and a great friend of King Hussein of Jordan.

He was interested in what contributions he could make to diplomacy, to humanitarian causes, and the promotion of peace.

And so, we remember today a loving and devoted husband and father and for those of us lucky to know him as a good friend. His family will carry forward the virtues that King Constantine epitomised. Integrity, compassion and the pursuit of a better world for his people.

And to King Constantine I say;
May the road rise up to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face;
The rains fall soft upon your fields
And until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of His hand.