

«One Century of History»

Festivities on the occasion of the 110th anniversary of the first ascent of Mount Olympus, Karya, Municipality of Ellassona, 4 August 2023

Address by H.E. Stefan Estermann
Ambassador of Switzerland to Greece

His Eminence, the Metropolitan of Ellassona Chariton

Dear Governor of Thessaly Mr. Agorastos

Dear Mayor of Ellassona Mr. Gatsas

Distinguished Members of Parliament

Esteemed Guests

Ονομάζομαι Stefan Estermann και είμαι ο Πρέσβης της Ελβετίας στην Ελλάδα από τον περασμένο Σεπτέμβριο. Από τότε που ανέλαβα τα καθήκοντά μου, ανακαλύπτω μια χώρα με απίστευτη ιστορία, παραδόσεις και πολιτισμό, καθώς και με ομορφιά που κόβει την ανάσα.

(My name is Stefan Estermann, and I am the Ambassador of Switzerland to Greece since September of last year. Since I took office, I have been discovering a Country of incredible history, traditions and culture, and of breathtaking beauty.)

Greece surprised me in many ways: Being generally known for its deep blue sea, the picturesque islands and the beautiful beaches, I have come to realize that there are also some very serious mountains. They might not be quite as high as the Swiss mountains in absolute terms, but what makes them spectacular is that they rise straight up from sea level, from level zero so to speak.

Today, I find myself at the foot of Mount Olympus, in your distinguished company, to commemorate the first ascent of the highest Greek mountain 110 years ago.

Two Swiss from Geneva, photographer Frédéric Boissonnas and writer and art historian Daniel Baud-Bovy, accompanied by a Greek guide, shepherd Christos Kakalos, became the first to climb the highest peak of Olympus, Mytikas, at 2917m, on 2 August 1913. Fun fact: Their first attempt, made the day before, on Switzerland's national holiday, failed, the three men having mistakenly climbed another nearby peak.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Swiss-Greek relations are based on more than 200 years of friendship, with Geneva as an epicenter of the philhellenic movement at the time when Greece fought for its independence from Ottoman rule. Ever since, outstanding personalities have again and again been enthusiastic about Greece and have dedicated their lives and creative energy to this unique country. Fred Boissonnas was one of them.

He visited Greece several times between 1900 and 1913 and between 1928 and 1930 and took thousands of photographs. He published numerous albums dedicated to Greece. His photos contributed decisively to the identity of Greece in Europe. They are a unique record of everyday life, monuments, towns and countryside in early 20th-century Greece.

Mount Olympus is not just any mountain. It is Olympus. There is probably no other mountain that is as strongly anchored in European cultural history. In ancient Greek mythology, it was the seat of the gods and its summit was considered a place filled with light.

I am very humbled but overwhelmed by the fact that the Swiss flag was raised on this mountain when the first humans came to the top 110 years ago.

Thank you!