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US president hails Greek-American community at independence day celebration



“The United States – and all of Western civilization – has been profoundly shaped by the extraordinary achievements of the Greek people, stretching all the way back to ancient times,” US President Donald Trump said on Monday, speaking at the annual celebration of Greece's independence from Ottoman rule at the White House.

“Today, we commemorate the Greeks’ long struggle to regain their independence from a foreign empire. On March 25th, 1821, Greek patriots rose up and fought to liberate their country, restore their sovereignty and reclaim their destiny,” Trump said in his welcoming address at the event, which was attended by leading representatives of the Greek-American community, including Archbishop Demetrios, ambassadors Haris Lalakos of Greece and Marios Lysiotis of Cyprus, the European Union's representative in the US, Stavros Lambrinidis, among many others.

“This evening, we also celebrate the countless ways Greek Americans strengthen and uplift and inspire our nation. You live by the values that are the foundation of America’s greatness,” said the US president. “You honor hard work. You love your families. You enrich your culture. And you embrace the American Dream.”

Trump also hailed Greek members of the American armed forces who were honored at the event, including Senior Airman Gregory Manuel and Major Carl Hollister, saying that “in every generation, Greek Americans have summoned the courage to defend our freedom.”

Addressing members of the Greek-American business world and community leaders, Trump thanked them for bringing “jobs and promise to cities and towns across America.”

The Greek-American community's big annual parade marking the March 25th anniversary will take place on April 14 in New York City.

Angelo L. Palivos a great and honorable man



On March 13, 2019, Mr. Angelo L. Palivos passed away. He was born on Valentine's Day, February 14, 1931. He was a resident of Chicago, Illinois and Vouliagmeni, Athens. Husband of the late Bessie (Gountanis) Palivos. He is survived by: Son, Louis A. Palivos and wife Lisa (Routsolias) and their five children, Angelo, (Christina, Demitra, Costantina) Aurelia, Maria, Billy, and Ellie;

His daughter, Eleni Bousis and husband Dimitri with their four children, Michael, (Verna, Dimitri, Mike Jr.), Victoria, Evangelo and George;

Son, Peter A. Palivos and his wife Vicky (Tyrovolis) and their three children, Angelo, Anastasia (Joe), and Gregory (Amanda); and

Son, George A. Palivos, wife, Eleni (Katris) and their four children, Angelo, Yiannis, Alexander and Billy.

Survived, by his sisters-in -laws and spouses, Katerina and George

(CONTINUED P.2)

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THE PLATFORM OF THE GREEK PRESS

- 1.To applaud the achievements of our ethnic group
- 2.To support the ideas of the Hellenic-Christian tradition
- 3.To promote the preservation of the Greek language
- 4.To encourage all worthy Community causes
- 5 To assist all the Greek-American fraternal, cultural patriotic and religious organizations
- 6.To install Americanism in the Greek-American community
- 7.To advance the just causes of Hellenism.
8. To promote the ideals Greece has given to humanity.

Angelo L. Palivos a great and honorable man

(FROM P.1)

Limperis, Georgia Gountanis wife of the late, Panagiotis Gountanis, James and Liana Gountanis, Connie Gountanis Rigas, Angie and Allan Lofgren, and Grandson Taylor.

He is also survived by many nieces, nephews, Godchildren, Koumbari and many friends from all over America and Greece.

Angelo Palivos was a great and honorable man who challenged all obstacles. Born in Bouliari, Gortinia, to the late Louis and Georgia Palivos, he was the youngest of six children. His father, a war hero, died at age 33, leaving Angelo an orphan at six months old. At the age of ten, he left his village to work as a coal carrier in Tripoli. As a youth, he had a rough and painful life working day and night to support himself.

Mr. Palivos learned independently how to be a prominent tailor and a great businessman. He fell in love with Vassiliki Gountanis and married her at age 19. He was smart and a hard worker who learned many trades. He had one challenge which limited his ability to flourish. Both his wife and him were deprived of education due to the hard times of World War II. Both wanted something more for their children. Therefore, they packed two suitcases and their one-hundred dollars in savings, and took their children across the Atlantic Ocean to pursue their American Dream of education and prosperity. Working three jobs, they accomplished and succeeded.

Mr. Palivos was a man loved by everyone. He and his late wife Bessie had 178 Godchildren and Koumbari.

He had compassion for the less fortunate, especially the orphans since he could relate to them. He was a committed and a devoted Greek Orthodox Christian. He loved the Lord's home, and he build many churches, and supported many monasteries. He will be missed for his vigilance, articulate discussions, great advise, compassion, empathy and the love he had for his children, Grandchildren, Great Grandchildren, relatives and friends.

Since Mr. Angelo Palivos will be laid to rest with his late wife in Nestani, Greece, his wishes are in lieu of flowers, to please make donations to one of the following two organizations which supported and treated him with love, respect and dignity:

* The Greek American Rehabilitation Care and Centre.
www.greekamericancare.org

* The Hippocratic Cancer Research Foundation, Robert H. Lurie comprehensive hospital

Visitation: Tuesday, March 19, 2019

3:00-900

Colonial Funeral Home

8025 W. Golf Rd

Niles, Illinois 60714

Funeral: Tuesday, March 26, 2019

Evagelistria Church

Visitation: 12:00 noon

Makaria: 1:00 followed by burial at St. Nikolaos Cemetery, Nestani, Arcadia, Greece

PICTURES OF THE WORLD



My youngest little star looking out over the wonderful world that is Greece at sunset - this image was taken on a beach at Koukounaries on the island of Skiathos."



Monet's Garden in Giverny, France, in June 2018. The beauty of the lush garden with rows of flower beds and majestic plants is breathtaking and peaceful. The famous water garden is full of asymmetries and curves that are inspired by the Japanese gardens."



Louise Standen: "This is my nephew on a day out visiting Port Lympne zoo in Kent. The gorilla was a youngster in the group and came over to the window to watch him. The gorilla stayed just gazing for about 10 minutes, mimicking my nephew when he moved his arms or shifted his position. How wonderful it is that we can interact like this with such an endangered animal, and even more wonderful that such an endangered animal would want to interact with the very species that is destroying their natural habitats."

Climate strikes spread worldwide as students call for action



Thousands of school pupils worldwide have abandoned classrooms for a day of protest against climate change.

India, South Korea, Australia and the US are among the countries where teenagers are already on strike.

The day of action is expected to embrace about 100 countries. They are inspired by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg, who protests weekly outside Sweden's parliament.

Scientists say tougher measures are needed to cut global warming.

The Paris climate agreement of 2017 committed nearly 200 countries to keeping global temperatures "well below" 2.0C (3.6F) above pre-industrial times and to striving for a maximum of 1.5C

The globally co-ordinated children's protests - promoted through posts on Twitter and other social media - have been going on for several months.

On Thursday Greta Thunberg's campaigning earned her a Nobel Peace Prize nomination.

In January at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, the 16-year-old told top executives and politicians that "on climate change, we have to acknowledge that we have failed".

Ministers in some countries have voiced concern about children skipping classes.

Australia's Education Minister Dan Tehan said "students leaving school during school hours to protest is not something that we should encourage".

UK Education Secretary Damian Hinds echoed that concern, and the government said the disruption increased teachers' workloads and wasted lesson time.

But Environment Secretary Michael Gove backed the protesting children, saying in a video: "Dear school climate strikers, we agree."

"Collective action of the kind you're championing can make a difference, and a profound one," he said.

Here are THREE big questions people are asking about climate change.

Is it too late to stop it?

No.

But it will be hugely expensive and mean changes to how we live and work. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change describes what needs to happen as "rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society".

The IPCC's most recent special report says renewable energy needs to almost replace fossil fuels by 2050.

They calculate the investment needed worldwide to transform our energy system is around \$2.4 trillion every year for the next fifteen years.

How do we get to zero emissions?

The IPCC's report has international targets on how we need to transform energy production.

Their overall target is for global emissions to be net zero by 2050.

First, by 2030 global emissions of CO2 need to have been reduced to just 45% of the levels in 2010.

During this time the use of coal needs to drop to close to zero.

Renewables should provide up to 85% of global electricity by 2050.

To make this happen they think an area of land around the size of Australia needs to be set aside for energy crops.

Can I do anything on my own?

Yes, you can.

Let's start with food. Eating less meat is the single biggest way to reduce your environmental impact, according to recent studies. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says we need to eat less meat, milk, cheese and butter.

You should also try to eat more locally-sourced, seasonal food - that hasn't been transported around the world - and throw less of it away.

It also wants us to buy electric cars but walk or cycle whenever we can.

You should insulate your home and turn the thermostat down a couple of degrees.

Also think about your energy provider - you can encourage investment in renewable energy by using it.

Recognition of Macedonian language a ‘grave mistake,’ says prominent linguist




Greece committed a “grave mistake” in recognizing the existence of a Macedonian language, prominent linguist and former education minister Georgios Babiniotis said, adding that the clause in the Prespes accord signed between Athens and Skopje could encourage minority claims in the future.

In comments made on Skai radio on Saturday, Babiniotis said that the language spoken in North Macedonia is in fact a “serbianized” Bulgarian dialect introduced by the Josip Tito regime which uses a variation of the Cyrillic alphabet and which has no affiliation to the Greek language.

He said that the language in question should more appropriately be referred to as Bulgarian-Serbian or Slavic-Macedonian.


The Prespes deal clarifies that the language belongs to the group of South Slavic languages.

Babiniotis said that although the deal clarifies that there is no such thing as a Macedonian minority in Greece, the recognition of a Macedonian language could be used as a stepping stone by scientific circles wishing to push minority claims.



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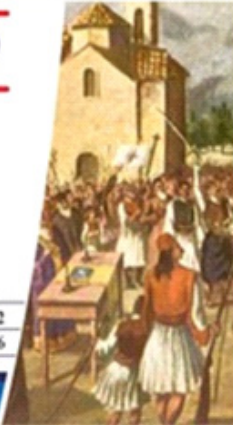
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Helen Maroulis: America's first female Olympic wrestling champion

CONNIE MOURTOUPALAS



Wrestling was never really my cup of tea. In Helen's face and curly hair, I saw her grandmother and namesake, Eleni Maroulis, a stoic Greek immigrant who came to the US from the small Ionian island of Kalamos in the late 1960s with her children, including Helen's father, 12-year-old Yiannis. Both our families immigrated to the US after President Johnson's Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 did away with the quota system, which till then limited the number of Southern Europeans coming into the country in favor of those from Northern Europe.

For the Rio Olympics, Helen trained harder than ever. Having lost to Yoshida twice before, she worked with a special coach to increase her upper body strength. She also watched videos of Yoshida wrestling for hours, Google-translating all her interviews to decode her style and technique.

Yet Helen's love of wrestling was not motivated by Olympic aspirations. While the gold validated her struggles, her journey began long before wrestling was even an Olympic sport. Stepping onto the mat, pink socks and all, at the age of 7, to act as her younger brother's sparring partner, this painfully shy little girl took to wrestling like a fish to water. So focused on her own movement and technique, the outside world all but vanished. This was a first for her, as her shyness had up until then made it impossible for her to follow through with other activities she had tried, including swimming, diving and ballet.

Ironically, the one sport she wanted to pursue came with many obstacles. She had to fight for the right to wrestle. And, as one of only two girl wrestlers in Maryland, where she was born in 1991, and only a few nationwide, she had to wrestle boys all through high school. Boys on the other hand would rather quit than lose to her, and in the 8th grade, they forfeited 10 of her games.

At 16, Helen moved a thousand miles from home to Marquette, Michigan, to train at the US Olympic Education Center, and has been living out of a suitcase since. She went on to study at Missouri Baptist University in St Louis, where she joined the women's wrestling team, transferring to Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Canada, where she studied marketing and competed in wrestling, earning four women's college national championship titles.

Her first loss in four years, it was the culmination of a year-long battle with a debilitating concussion she suffered in January 2018 in New Delhi, India. Impacting her brain's emotional control center, the injury wreaked havoc with both her physical health and her emotions, and included personality changes, and scary thoughts. With her symptoms misdiagnosed, her recovery was long and nerve-racking. Taking matters into her own hands, she learned the hard way how little those in the field, especially coaches, know about head injuries, and how important it is that they educate themselves.

Paula has spent a good part of her life on the road, driving her daughter to her competitions, often a thousand miles at a time. Having struggled with anxiety herself, this is her way of better understanding herself, her competitors and teammates. She especially loves visiting Kalamos, her father's birthplace, where she's been going since she was a toddler. The people of Kalamos love her back, and even organized a parade in her honor.

By all accounts, Helen has done wonders for women's wrestling in the US, not only through institutional changes, but also by inspiring girls to pursue the sport, making high school girls wrestling one of the fastest-growing sports in the country. She is reluctant to take credit, however. It's taken a village, she says, to get where I am today. In addition to her parents, she credits coaches along the way who stood up for her right to wrestle. She credits everyone on her support team who makes sure she is prepared to be the best she can be.

She has been completely dominant in women's wrestling since 2015, winning two world titles and an Olympic gold in three different weight classes, going 78-1 overall during the past three years. No other American wrestler has gone unscored upon at an Olympics or Worlds in the last 30 years. Helen did it in 2015 and 2017.

Helen's future in wrestling, like her journey to date, is a step-by-step plan. She doesn't think in terms of breaking records. She plans to compete through 2020 and participate in the 2020 Olympics. She will then re-evaluate. It's always about the next step. While she is well aware that she can't compete forever, she knows that wrestling will always be in her life, whether through coaching or working to inspire young people, as she already does. Aware of her responsibilities as a role model, she is always mindful to act responsibly and pass on the right messages to younger athletes. Again, quietly and without much ado or publicity, she makes special appearances and works with children hoping to empower and inspire them to follow their dreams, whether in wrestling or not.

Regardless of her future plans or achievements, however, Helen will always be the girl who cleared the path for thousands of girls to pursue their wrestling dreams. She will always be America's first female Olympic gold champion, the descendant of immigrants who made American history.

The influence of Greek Americans and relations with Turkey



The presence of the Greek-American community is an intrinsic factor in any equation that concerns Greece. The power of the diaspora – which is sometimes evident publicly and officially and, at others, discreetly – should not be discounted by any party who poses a direct or indirect threat to Greece or Cyprus. Despite personal grudges or even deep divisions within the community, Greeks and Cypriots in America are a force to be reckoned with.

The annual celebration at the White House of Greek independence may be mostly symbolic in nature – even though only a handful of communities in America can boast such a ceremony – but the influence of the Greek Americans is by no means negligible.

Many often complain that it is not blatant or effective enough, but those who know how the American political system works – and unfortunately there are only a few in Greece – know that despite the acknowledged weaknesses, things are being done and results are being produced.

This has been apparent in recent months in the case of the sale of F-35 fighter jets to Turkey. Obviously this is mainly a case about America's strategic interests and geopolitical priorities, not Greek or Cypriot concerns. Nevertheless, Greek-American – as well as pro-Greek – senators and congressmen in Washington have been at the vanguard of the effort to stop the jets from being delivered to Turkey, making bold interventions that reflect their influence and interest in not upsetting the balance of power in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan may have been distancing himself from the United States with his behavior, but he does not have the luxury of being able to engage in an all-out confrontation with Washington. In this regard, he needs to consider that when he makes threats against Greece and Cyprus, he is not only exacerbating tension in an area where he believes himself to have the military advantage, but also damaging Turkey's image in the United States, with everything that entails for his country.

It's not just the military dimension that Turkey needs to deal with and be more cautious about. A few months ago, US President Donald Trump was moved to threaten Turkey quite openly and practically bring the country's economy to its knees over the incarceration of an American pastor. Like it or not, the world's biggest economic and military power has the ability to make a lot of things happen.

Hence, anyone who looks at Greek-Turkish relations as one-dimensional is gravely mistaken. There is a lot more at play. The equation is a complex one that often includes other, powerful players.

Ethiopian Airlines: 'Clear similarities' with Indonesia crash



Flight data from the Ethiopian Airlines disaster a week ago suggest "clear similarities" with a crash off Indonesia last October, Ethiopia's transport minister has said. Both planes were Boeing 737 Max 8 aircraft. Last Sunday the Ethiopian Airlines jet crashed after take-off from Addis Ababa, killing all 157 people on board. "Clear similarities were noted between Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 and Indonesian Lion Air Flight 610, In both cases flight tracking data showed the aircraft's altitude had fluctuated sharply, as the planes seemed to experience erratic climbs and descents.

Strict customs rules on North Macedonia



The head of the Independent Authority for Public Revenue, Giorgos Pitsilis, has issued clear guidelines to all Greek customs offices over how they should deal with transactions between Greece and North Macedonia from now on.

As of Monday all documents North Macedonia issues (travel documents, identification cards, driver’s licenses, various certificates etc) and all kinds of correspondence and related material originating from the authorities in Skopje will have to bear the country’s new name and the agreed terminology.

According to the Athens-Skopje agreement ratified earlier this year, if formal correspondence of North Macedonia’s state authorities and entities with Greece does not comply with the proper name of that country and the terminology agreed, it will not be accepted and will be immediately returned to the sender.

Pitsilis has ordered customs officials to ensure that all customs documents submitted upon entry into Greece bear the code “MK: North Macedonia.” Until the new passports are issued by Skopje, the authorities of North Macedonia will stamp all travel documents with the country’s new name, while new car plates should bear the code NM or NMK.

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GREEK NEWS

Monthly income lasts 19 days on average for most households



The Greek economy's scars from the decade-long financial crisis and the internal devaluation are more than obvious. Despite the slight improvement in certain income-related indexes, three in 10 households get by on an annual income of less than 10,000 euros, while pensions comprise the main source of income for almost half of all households, according to a survey published on Wednesday by the Institute of Small Enterprises of the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen & Merchants (GSEVEE).

In this first survey after the completion of the bailout programs, GSEVEE found that 43.9 percent of households reported a decline in their incomes last year compared to 2017. Almost half of the households surveyed (48.9 percent) reported income stability, up from one in three (35.6 percent) in 2017, while 7.1 percent said they had seen an increase, up from just 2 percent in 2017.

At the same time, the share of households on an annual income of less than 10,000 euros remained quite high, at 31.7 percent, against 34.2 percent in 2017.

The biggest income bracket is that of households with earnings of between 10,000 and 18,000 euros per year, accounting for 39.8 percent in 2018 against 37.5 percent in 2017. This illustrates the shift of a number of households that were in the bottom bracket to a higher one; however, it also points to declines in the incomes of some households that in 2017 had been in the over-18,000 euros per annum bracket.

The bulk of Greek households find themselves in the bottom two income tiers.

More than one in eight (12.7 percent) households say their incomes do not suffice to cover their basic needs, and more than half (52.5 percent) say their monthly income is not enough to carry them through all 30 days, sufficing instead for an average of just 19 days per month.

All this is explained by the fact that 49.1 percent of households have a main pension as their primary source of income, even if that has been significantly

Erdogan says Turkey will never go back from S-400 deal with Russia, may look into S-500



Turkey will never turn back from a deal to purchase S-400 missile defence systems from Russia, President Tayyip Erdogan said on Wednesday, adding that Ankara may subsequently look into buy-

ing S-500 systems.

Washington has previously warned that procuring the S-400 systems from Russia could jeopardise defence industry deals between the NATO allies, and this week decided to end preferential trade with Turkey.

In an interview with broadcaster Kanal 24, Erdogan also said that the United States should not try to discipline Turkey though trade measures, adding that Turkey had its own measures prepared.

Russia recognizes name of 'Republic of North Macedonia' despite doubts



Russia recognizes the Republic of North Macedonia as the country's new official name, Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on Monday, despite having previously expressed reservations about the legitimacy of the name change.

The country's parliament passed an amendment to the constitution in January to rename the country, under an agreement with Greece to put an end to a 27-year-old dispute between the neighboring countries. [Reuters]

Former prime minister Costas Simitis blasts government tactics

Greece's former socialist prime minister Costas Simitis slammed the



SYRIZA government's economic policy for fueling uncertainty among investors and condemning the country to "systematic economic decline."

"We have the biggest public debt, a low growth rate, very high unemployment, a low competitiveness rate and a poor record on issues of social fairness, justice and corruption," Simitis said during an event organized by the Network of Contemporary Democrats, a political movement set up by former PASOK reformists.

Simitis said SYRIZA was resorting to demagoguery and fabrications to extent its grasp on power ahead of elections later this year.

"The government's economic policy is centered around handouts and benefits, which, in turn, fuel clandestine labor and tax evasion," he said. "The government... disguises reality, which is eventually revealed to us through Brussels."

Eight arrested over clashes during Greek soccer derby

Police say they have so far arrested eight people in connection with clashes which led to the abandonment of Sunday's soccer derby at the Olym-

pic Stadium of Athens between visiting Olympiakos and Panathinaikos.

The arrests were made with the aid



of footage showing fans clashing with police outside the stadium and others attacking the Olympiakos bench on the pitch. An Olympiakos official said that one of the attackers was carrying a knife.

German referee Marco Fritz decided to stop the game with the score at 0-1 due to the effects of tear gas used by police to subdue clashes outside the stadium and the presence of Panathinaikos supporters on the sidelines compromising security. The match will likely be awarded to Olympiakos with a 3-0 score while Panathinaikos will most probably have six points deducted.

According to a recent law passed by Deputy Sports Minister Giorgos Vassiliadis, all those arrested will be prosecuted and banned from entering stadiums.

Turkish FM accuses Greece of failing to protect rights of minority in Thrace

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu has criticized Greece of fail-



ing to uphold the rights of its Muslim minority in Western Thrace and of forbidding its members to call themselves "Turks."

He was speaking after the 54th meeting of the European Union-Turkey Association Council on Friday, during which Brussels reiterated its concerns over the candidate country's continuing backsliding in the areas of fundamental rights and the rule of law, as well as the deterioration of the independence and functioning of the judiciary. "Greece does not recognize the religious rights of the minority and the muftis [Muslim religious leaders] cannot exercise their rights," said Cavusoglu, who is also Turkey's chief negotiator, in response to a journalist's question.

He added that Turks who live in Greece cannot call themselves "Turks" despite previous rulings by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on the matter.

Complaint over PPC charges for CO2



The Hellenic Union of Industrial Consumers of Energy (UNICEN) has sent a second letter of complaint to the Regulatory Authority for Energy (RAE) regarding the carbon dioxide charges by Public Power Corporation in its medium- and high-voltage power rates.

UNICEN again called for the intervention of the energy regulator as the first letter sent on February 25 concerning the same issue drew no response from RAE.

According to UNICEN, the PPC methodology for the calculation of the CO2 charge is inappropriate as it does not reflect the fluctuations in the greenhouse gas footprint that varies considerably from month to month.

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Trump dealt blow as US trade deficit jumps



The US trade gap with the rest of the world jumped to a 10-year high of \$621bn (£472.5bn) last year, dealing a blow to President Donald Trump's deficit reduction plan.

The trade deficit is the difference between how much goods and services the US imports from other countries and how much it exports.

Reducing the gap is a key plank of Mr Trump's policies.

But in 2018, the US exported fewer goods compared with how much it bought.

Mr Trump claims that the US is being "ripped off" by other nations and wants countries to lower their tariffs on US goods and buy more of them. However, official data shows that while exports of US goods and services rose by \$148.9bn last year, imports jumped by \$217.7bn. It means that the gap is the widest since 2008, when the global financial crisis hit and the US fell into recession.

The deficit in goods and services during December also hit a near 10-year high of \$59.8bn. Exports to the rest of the world fell 1.9% to \$205.1bn, while imports rose by 2.1% to \$264.9bn.

'Tariff man'



The US is currently locked in a trade battle with China over what it claims are unfair trade practices, resulting in tit-for-tat tariff increases on each others' goods. Both nations are in discussions and there is speculation they could reach an agreement by the end of March.

New data shows that the trade gap between the US and China widened last year by \$43.6bn to \$419.2bn as exports of American products and services fell, but imports from China rose.

It was one of Donald Trump's signature campaign promises. Back in June 2016, he stood before a large crowd in Monessen, Pennsylvania and said that as President, he would reduce America's ballooning trade deficit. He called it "a political and politician-made disaster" and said "it can be corrected". Only it hasn't exactly turned out that way. Last year, Mr Trump introduced tariffs on steel and aluminium from around the globe and on a range of imports from China.

The idea was that the tariffs would make imports more expensive, thereby discouraging Americans from buying foreign goods and services and shrinking the trade deficit. But the opposite has happened. Instead, Donald Trump goes into the presidential re-election race having failed to deliver on his campaign promise to close the US trade deficit.

Part of the problem is Mr Trump's own tax policies. They boosted US consumption and a lot of that spending went abroad. This happened as growth was slowing in other parts of the world, contributing to a rising dollar. That made US exports more expensive and less competitive.

Of course, an economic downturn would help reduce the trade deficit. But who wants that? Mr Trump warned in December that if the two countries failed to reach an agreement on trade, he would take action, dubbing himself "a Tariff Man". The deficit between the US and the European Union also increased in 2018, up by \$17.9bn to \$169.3bn. Following the same trend as with China, US export growth to the EU was eclipsed by imports of European goods and services to America, which last year rose to \$487.9bn. Following a spat between the US and the EU when America lifted tariffs on steel and aluminium, Mr Trump and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker last year reached a truce.

However, Mr Trump may choose to lift tariffs on European cars and parts after the US Commerce Department produced a report examining whether the imports threaten national security. Meanwhile, US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom are meeting on Wednesday in Washington, where the issue of allowing America's agriculture industry access to Europe is expected to be discussed.

The SpaceX company has launched a capsule designed to carry people from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.



The mission is uncrewed for this flight, but if it goes well, the American space agency is likely to approve the system for regular astronaut use from later this year. SpaceX founder Elon Musk said this could be the first step towards opening space travel to commercial customers. Not since the retirement of the shuttles in 2011 has the US been able to put humans in orbit.

SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket and Dragon crew capsule lifted off from Kennedy's historic Pad 39A at the precise planned time of 02:49 EST (07:49 GMT). The 11-minute ascent put the Dragon on a path to rendezvous with the International Space Station (ISS) on Sunday.

Who is this character Ripley?

Because this is just a demonstration, there are no astronauts aboard - but there is a "test dummy". Dressed in a spacesuit and sitting next to a window, this anthropomorphic simulator is fitted with sensors around the head, neck, and spine.

It will gather data on the type of forces that humans will experience when they get to ride in the spacecraft. SpaceX has nicknamed the dummy "Ripley" - after the Sigourney Weaver character in the Alien movies.

For the California company, this mission is a key milestone in its short history. Mr Musk, a technology entrepreneur and engineer, set up the organisation with the specific intention of taking people into space. "It's been 17 years to get to this point, from 2002 to now. To be frank, I'm a little emotionally exhausted because it was super stressful," he told reporters immediately after the launch.

"Our focus has been on serving Nasa's needs but once Dragon is in regular operation, I think we will seek commercial customers of which the Nasa administrator, and Nasa in general, has been very supportive."

Mr Musk said those customers could include private citizens going to the ISS, just as they have done on Soyuz vehicles in the past.

Separately, the entrepreneur is developing a much bigger system - which he calls the Starship and Super Heavy rocket - to transport people to the Moon and Mars. The Dragon crew capsule is a variant on the ISS cargo freighter flown by SpaceX. Upgrades include life-support systems, obviously; and more powerful thrusters to push the vessel to safety if something goes wrong with a rocket during an ascent to orbit. It also has four parachutes instead of the freighter's three to control the return to Earth.

How has Nasa changed since the shuttle?

Nasa is essentially now contracting out crew transport to SpaceX.

Whereas in the past, Nasa engineers would have top-down control of all aspects of vehicle design and the agency would own and operate the hardware - the relationship with industry has been put on a completely new footing. Today, Nasa sets broad requirements and industry is given plenty of latitude in how it meets those demands. Agency officials still check off every step, but the approach is regarded as more efficient and less costly.

Nasa chief, Jim Bridenstine, stressed on Saturday that the re-introduction of American crew transport did not mean an end to cooperation with Russia.

"We want to make sure that we keep our partnership with Russia which has been very strong for a long period of time, going all the way back to the Apollo-Soyuz era," he said.

"But we also want to make sure we have our own capability to get back and forth to the International Space Station, so that we can have this strong partnership where they can launch on our rockets and we can launch on their rockets."

How should this mission play out?

After being taken to orbit, the Dragon makes its own way to the station using onboard thrusters. One of the big differences between this mission and standard cargo flights is the mode of approach and attachment to the ISS. Freighters come up under the orbiting lab and are grappled by a robotic arm and pulled into a berthing position.

On this occasion, we will see the crew version of Dragon approach the station at the bow and dock automatically, using a new design of connection ring. Arrival is set for 11:00 GMT on Sunday. ISS astronauts will be watching closely to see that the capsule behaves as it should. The Dragon is expected to stay at the station until Friday. The current plan has it undocking, firing its thrusters to come out of orbit, and splashing down at roughly 13:45 GMT. Kirk Shireman, the manager of Nasa's ISS programme, said: "You'll hear us talk about this being a flight test; it absolutely is, although we view it also as a real mission, a very critical mission. "The ISS still has three people onboard so this mission coming up to the ISS for the first time has to work; it has to work."

Nasa is also working with Boeing on crew transport. The company has developed a capsule of its own called the Starliner. This will have its equivalent demo flight in the next couple of months.