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AN INSULTING ARTICLE IN VANITY FAIR

EDITOR'S NOTE

As Greek Americans, we find the article in *Vanity Fair* very insulting. Even though there are many true statements in this article, it is obvious that the author made a very superficial treatise of the subject interjected, lots of personal frustrations with the Greek way of living and has poorly researched the economic crisis of the European Union members. Many documented and balanced articles have been written in newspapers and magazines on this subject and none of them predicted the sinking of Greece with all its people as the author of the article mathematically prophesied. As a first step, we publish this article to its entirety and we urge our readers to spread their dissatisfaction around the best way they know.

SOTIRIS
REKOUMIS

Letter from Athens: Turn Out the Lights, The Party's Over for Greece

Apparently Prime Minister George "Pollyanna" Papandreou didn't get the memo he should have written himself, that, like the Titanic, Greece will sink and that it's a mathematical certainty. While he was giving a rally-round-the-flag speech to his dispirited troops in PASOK's formerly Socialist party, saying that Greece can overcome its economic crisis, he left out the part that it requires a common will and a common good for a civilization to prosper, neither of which the majority of Greeks have.

So while he was whistling through the graveyard and saying, "Can we win this battle? Yes, we can," a devastating piece in the American magazine *Vanity Fair*, written by Michael Lewis, a widely-respected economic journalist, essentially said that Greece is doomed because its people not only accept, tolerate, and condone corruption, taking and giving bribes and evading taxes, but lead the parade. That will never change. For Lewis, the underlying question is whether Greeks will change their

civic responsibility.

But Modern Greece is the antithesis of Ancient Greece, and words like arete and axios have disappeared. Lewis wrote that he finds Greek



people "funny, warm, smart, and good company." But Greeks' perception of one another is much different, he claimed. "Everyone is pretty sure everyone is cheating on his taxes, or bribing politicians, or taking bribes, or lying about the value of his real estate. And this total absence of faith in

one another is reinforcing. The epidemic of lying and cheating and stealing makes any sort of civic life impossible; the collapse of civic life only encourages more lying, cheating, and stealing." He said that, "The structure of the Greek economy is collectivist, but the country, in spirit, is the opposite of a collective. Its real structure is every man for himself."

These are fighting words to Greeks, although they are true, and Greek Americans, by condoning this kind of behavior, are complicit in the near ruination of the country. A tiny minority of honest and hard-working Greeks have been overrun by the Greedy Majority and what's likely to come from this is Greeks and Greek Americans killing the messenger instead of curing the cancer spreading through the body politic and population. When Greek Americans who live in Greece - proving their love - complain about this way of thinking, they are dismissed as being American and not Greek. That's the good part, of course, because more American qualities are needed in Greece, starting with a work ethic and paying your taxes. While Papandreou was busy dispensing platitudes such as, "We give this battle all together. Every day, every moment, we move forward, facing the future with optimism and hope" to his people, trying to prop them up for what may be massive defeats for his party at the municipal elections in November, the math against him and Greece was adding up, despite the \$146 billion

(Continued p.3)

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PUBLISHER

SOTIRIS REKOUMIS

EDITOR

DENISE REKOUMIS

LAYOUTS

JOHN REKOUMIS

CONTRIBUTORS

DR. STAVROS BASSEAS, JHON REKOUMIS,
DENISE REKOUMIS, DR JORDAN TSOLAKIDIS,
CHRIS MERENTITIS

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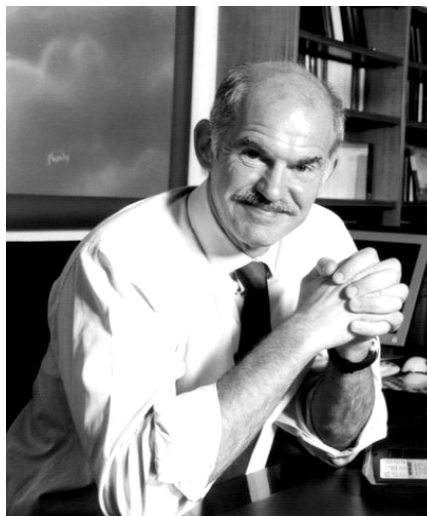


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PM seeks to bolster Greece abroad

After cautious encouragement from Brussels, Papandreou heads to US to boost ties, woo investors

As Prime Minister George Papandreou prepared yesterday for a trip to the US, hav-



ing received messages of cautious support from his European Union counterparts in Brussels, the government spokesman indicated that bolstering Greece's battered image abroad was as important as pushing through difficult economic reforms at home.

"Our immediate duty was to save the country [from bankruptcy]," said Giorgos Petalotis. "Now our duty is to reinforce it on an international level," he said.

Striking back at criticism from the main conservative opposition New Democracy over the government's agreement with its international creditors, which have pledged to lend Greece 110 billion euros, Petalotis stressed that the country's largest deficit was

its "lack of credibility on the international stage." "We have done everything we can to convince our [EU] partners that this time the statistics we are giving them are a true reflection of reality," Petalotis said.

The government spokesman was speaking just a few hours before Papandreou was to board a plane for the US. The premier is to attend the United Nations' 65th General Assembly and take part in a debate on the prospects for the Greek economy at the Economic Club of New York, a respected forum for entrepreneurs and economists. During his visit,



Papandreou will meet with American and US-based Greek businesspeople to discuss possible cooperation that could help Greece to boost growth and lay the groundwork for its emergence from a deepening recession. Papandreou will also have a series of meetings with diplomats in Washington, Petalotis said, without determining what issues would be on the agenda.

Meanwhile Finance Ministry officials continued their talks with members of the International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and European Commission – known locally as the troika – regarding Greece's progress in gathering much-needed revenue, chiefly from tax collection, and curbing public spending. The monitors are due to depart Athens on Tuesday, leaving ministry officials with a report on the country's progress.

Poverty and intolerance

By Nikos Xydakis

The recent attacks on Afghan immigrants in the district of Aghios Panteleimonas did not surprise anybody. Unfortunately, such incidents are expected to become more frequent and to spread. Hatred is not restricted to within the confines of Aghios Panteleimonas.

Large parts of the capital, historic neighborhoods that host large numbers of working-class people, have for many years now been treated with neglect and conceit by the central authorities as well as the majority of the better-off. The older generations of Athenians left their homes in the city center for a new life in the suburbs. The old neighborhoods started to decline as the demographics shifted.



Most of the immigrants who set foot in this country during the 1990s found homes in these half-abandoned districts. It made sense: Rents were cheap, and the new arrivals were the only ones willing to live in the basements. Albanians, Poles and other Eastern Europeans gave new life to these neighborhoods, to the local schools and shops. With time, they became better off; they bought their own houses; they began to integrate with mainstream society while lending it their own color.

But things were different with the next wave of migrants. Those who arrived here from Asia and Africa have hardly managed to integrate – if at all. Lawbreaking, petty crime, poverty and the endless influx of migrants increased the strain on these already troubled neighborhoods. Lack of order and lawlessness became the norm. Coexistence between the different ethnic groups became hard or impossible. So now we have three groups of peoples trying to live next to each other in the midst of crisis: financially hit Greeks, the more-or-less integrated first- and second-generation Albanians and, finally, the Africans and Asians living on the fringes of society. Many of the latter cannot speak Greek or find a steady job.

With our urban infrastructure in such a sorry state, with poverty fanning xenophobia and racism, and with some people organizing themselves into race-based gangs, coexistence appears extremely difficult. It's an explosive mix. Large sections of the city have turned into human waste dumps, into societal and constitutional black holes. The state is not there; the state does not care. Trapped in intolerance and anger, some people are tempted to take law in their own hands.



Afghans have voted in a key parliamentary election, with turnout estimated at about 40%, although there have been a number of Taliban attacks. At least 14 people were killed, the Afghan interior ministry said, including six security force members in a Taliban attack in the north.

AN INSULTING ARTICLE IN VANITY FAIR

in emergency loans given by the European Union and International Monetary Fund – in return for public sector wage cuts, higher taxes, and pension slashes that have pushed the country toward a Depression.

Past Greek Administrations (including one in which Papandreou served) which made Zimbabwe look like the winner of the Good Government Award, were found to have lied about the country's economic condition to get into the Eurozone, countries using the euro as their currency. So what do we say about this administration, which reported a \$360 billion deficit, but which Lewis alleges is really \$1.2 trillion. That, boys and girls, is more than all the reserves in China, a country of 1.3 billion people.

People will say Papandreou had no choice but to implement tough austerity measures such as cutting public sector salaries and raising taxes and holding pensioners hostage, but he did, of course. That would have been letting go of the redundant workforce of civil servants. If you're faced with losing a few thousand people or punishing a million to save face and patronage jobs, the math's not that hard.

Instead, the across-the-board caning (exempting the rich and politicians) still won't be enough, so look for more. Teachers have already been told their pay cut of 10% could become 30%, and if that happens to all public workers, you can look for the prediction made by Hans-Werner Sinn, head of Germany's IFO Institute, to come true.

"The policy of forced 'internal devaluation,' deflation and depression could risk driving Greece to the edge of civil war," Sinn told a gathering of political and business leaders in Italy. "It is impossible to cut wages by 30% without major riots." That's something Greeks are good at, of course. What do you expect when, as Lewis reported, many working class people can't buy enough food and every single one of the 300 Members of Parliament are tax evaders and the rich are still partying in Kolonaki, drinking wine from the skulls of the near-dead working-class? We love to say "We told you so," because Vanity Fair put its imprimatur on what The National Herald has been reporting for several years,

to almost no response, because, as Zorba said: "On a deaf man's door you can knock forever."

Lewis said he found that the Greek psyche of selfishness, the acid of zelevounai, and culture of corruption are the real problems and reason why mathematical attempts to save the economy are doomed. Greece's problem is attitudinal, the acceptance of petty lawlessness that leads to the avarice that has morally, and now financially, bankrupt the country.

Case in point: When the fifth all-out smoking ban in 10 years was implemented on Sept. 1, Helena Smith, the widely respected correspondent in Greece for the London newspaper The Guardian, reported that the same night she and several friends went to a restaurant where smoking was now allegedly banned and – in front of a government minister, lit up to test the law. No one stopped them. Case in Point: in a country where you can park your car on the sidewalk, it's not long before you can do whatever you want. Every workday I walk up the allegedly pedestrian walkway of Voukourestiou Street, which houses posh shops such as Ralph Lauren, Prada and Ermengildo Zegna, a causeway for the idle rich. It's also a shortcut for motorcyclists who routinely roar through, sometimes while motorcycle cops are standing there smoking and ignoring them.

That you expect in Greece. But the other day, a Mercedes Benz Smart car was using it as a personal shopper's road, weaving in and out of pedestrians jumping out of the way, and it almost hit me as I came up and didn't see it. You'd think the four municipal cops who saw this and stopped the driver might have pulled him out and impounded the car. Instead, they chatted with him, smiled and waved me out of the way so he could continue, getting a good glance at the Rolex watches. If you can't keep cars off pedestrian walkways, you can't keep the Ship of State afloat. Greece is the Titanic. It will sink. It's a mathematical certainty, but this time all the passengers are staying on board, the rich partying as it goes down, the poor trapped in steerage, until the lights go out by themselves.

Greece is on target, premier assures Brussels

Prime Minister George Papandreou faces the media in Brussels recently before talks with



European Union leaders on Greece's progress in tackling its debt crisis and plans to create an EU task force for economic governance.

In Brussels, Prime Minister George Papandreou declared that his government was progressing slowly but surely with difficult reforms.



"We are on the right track and, although the course is a tough one, we are making real progress and pushing through real changes," Papandreou told reporters upon his arrival at the European Commission's headquarters.

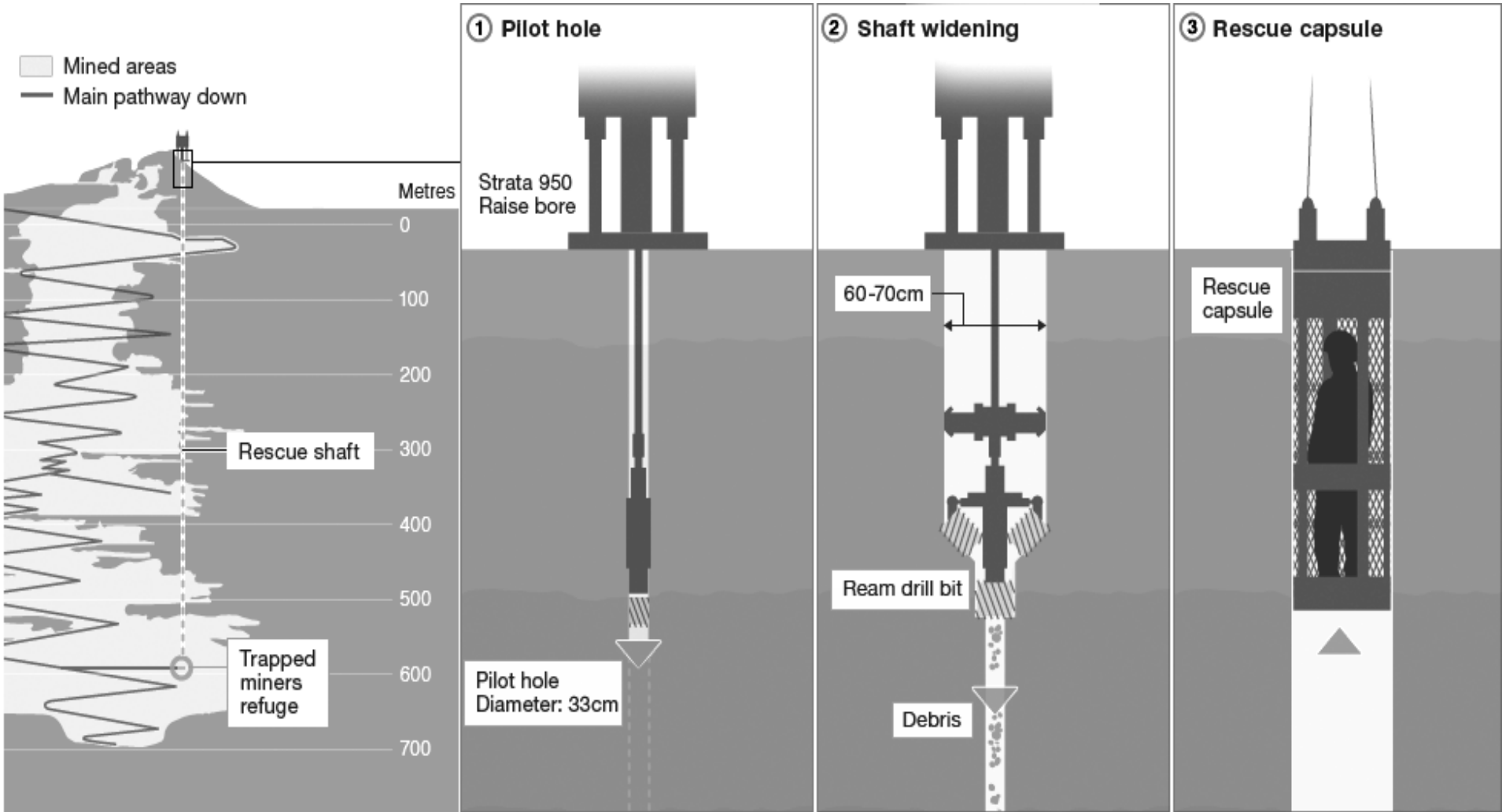
EU heads of state discussed a range of sub-

jects at the summit, including Greece's progress in pushing through reforms as well as France's controversial evictions of members of its Roma community from settlements. The matter of Greece's debt problems was somewhat overshadowed by the Roma evictions, which drew widespread criticism from heads of state. But Greece was also expected to come under some pressure, as certain EU member states, including Germany, are believed to be in favor of the stricter monitoring of the government's progress in collecting revenue and curbing spending.

Papandreou yesterday reassured his EU counterparts that his administration has the situation under control despite a shortfall in revenue collection. "Greece is meeting its commitments," he said. "It has reduced its spending so that the drop in revenue will not have a negative impact on it meeting its targets," Papandreou added, referring to the goals set out in an agreement signed in May between his government and its three creditors – Greece's European Union partners, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which have pledged to lend Greece 110 billion euros over the next three years.

Speaking after the talks, Papandreou said that the issue of economic governance within the EU figured high on the meeting's agenda. "But the matter of deficits is only one aspect of this debate," Papandreou said. "What is needed is responsible governance, a strategy for growth, a transition to the green economy – and all this under a comprehensive European Union policy," he said. Addressing reporters late yesterday, European Council President Herman Van Rompuy said EU leaders had achieved a broad consensus on creating a task force for economic governance that would "monitor and correct imbalances, the risk of bubbles and divergences in competitiveness."

Chile miners: Trapped underground



The operation to dig down to reach the miners is expected to take up to four months. Of the three planned drilling operations, two have already started.

The first to get underway is using a specialist mining drill called a Strata 950 raise bore machine which will cut down to level 100, 702m deep, where the miners are sheltering.

After creating a pilot hole, the shaft will be widened to enable a rescue capsule to be lowered and raised for each man. As the hole is reamed out to a width of some 70cm, tonnes of debris and rock will fall down the hole. Engineers estimate that 12-15 tonnes of rock will need to be cleared by the trapped miners each day. They have at least two functioning trucks in the tunnel and other equipment for moving rubble. Diesel and other materials will be supplied down the various communication shafts.

A second operation - Plan B - started on 5 September using a faster raise bore-type drill, a Schramm T-130, to cut down to level 135, 678m below the surface. The pilot hole reached a workshop a few hundred metres from the miners' refuge on 17 September. The operation was delayed when the drill bit shattered and pieces had to be fished out by large magnets.

It is still expected to take a few weeks to widen the Plan B hole for a rescue capsule to be sent down.

The third operation - Plan C - is expected to start on 20 September using an oil industry machine that will dig at an angle of 85 degrees to level 150, 567m down.



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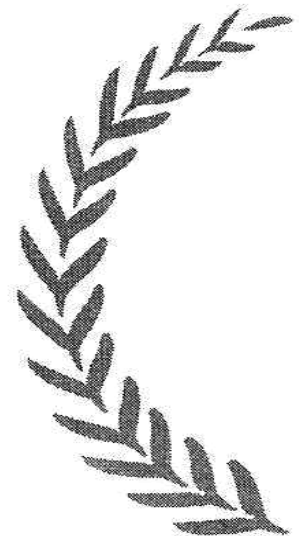
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NEWS FROM GREECE

State revenue held back by tardy trials

New Justice Ministry statistics show that nearly half a million cases of alleged tax-related offenses are pending at courts around the country, obstructing the dispensation of justice but also holding back much-needed state revenue at a time when the debt-ridden government is desperate to refill state coffers and plug a gaping budget deficit.

According to ministry statistics, around 120,000 new cases reach the country's administrative courts every year. Of these, just 85,000 are heard, meaning that some 35,000 remain pending, adding to the existing backlog. As it takes an estimated 11 to 13 years for each tax-related case to be resolved, the process of plowing through this backlog is extremely slow. Consequently, hundreds of thousands of euros in fines for tax evasion and other offenses are not collected.

Court clerks yesterday staged a work stoppage from 7.30 a.m. until 11.30 a.m., protesting staff shortages and the lack of sufficient courtrooms to handle the huge backlog of cases.

The clerks say there are approximately 2,500 vacant positions in the country's courts, a figure they fear could double as hundreds of their colleagues have rushed to take early retirement ahead of the implementation of the new pension law which raises the retirement age and cuts monthly payments.

Truckers dig in heels over reforms

Protesting truck drivers yesterday kept their vehicles parked alongside major highways on the outskirts of Athens, threatening to press on with their protest action after a draft bill foreseeing the opening up of their sector to competition was approved by a parliamentary committee. The legislation is to be submitted to Parliament's plenary session early next week in order to be voted into law.

Unionists representing the truckers, who had joined a debate on the bill in Parliament earlier in the week, expressed their disappointment with the Transport Ministry's refusal to grant them concessions and threatened to continue with their action.

As the provisions of the draft bill were discussed in Parliament, long lines of parked trucks caused traffic chaos on the Athens-Corinth national road at Haidari, Elefsina and at other junctions. A large police presence remained on standby to block truckers from driving their vehicles into central Athens in a bid to highlight their grievances. The protesters had attempted to advance to the city center several times earlier in the week but were stopped each time by police.

Unionists expressed disappointment after their talks with government officials collapsed and said they would continue their action indefinitely until they are offered some concessions.

Transport Minister Dimitris Reppas remained unmoved. He said the truckers'

calls for the reforms to be introduced five years from now rather than three, as the bill foresees, were not workable and he appealed to unionists to "look forward to a new, modernized European system rather than struggling to perpetuate an outdated one."

"Some people are doing all they can to preserve the existing anachronistic regime when all other European countries pushed through crucial reforms much earlier," Reppas said.

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"Some people are doing all they can to preserve the existing anachronistic regime when all other European countries pushed through crucial reforms much earlier," Reppas said. ND leader Samaras visits Thessaloniki

Samaras in Thessaloniki

Main opposition New Democracy (ND) party leader Antonis Samaras met on Friday with production sector representatives during his visit to Thessaloniki within the framework of the 75th International Trade Fair (TIF) taking place in the city. He met with his party's candidates who will run in November's local government elections. He also attended the ND party committee meeting scheduled to be held in Thessaloniki later in the afternoon.

On Friday evening the ND leader visited the local economic chamber and afterwards he attended events hosted by the party's youth movement. On Saturday morning, Samaras visited TIF pavilions and later he met with local authorities. In the evening he addressed production sector representatives.

Temple of Athena Nike on Acropolis restored

Standing a full metre taller than before and without the scaffolding that enveloped it for the past decade, the slim temple of Athena Nike atop the Acropolis in central Athens was again in full view as of this month following the completion of restoration work.

The small temple was among the ancient marble structures on the Acropolis that had suffered the most extensive damage over the years, even as far back as 1687 when it was badly damaged by a mortar shell lobbed by besieging Venetians against an Ottoman garrison barricaded on the hill. It had also been frequently restored since 1935, though not always correctly.

When the Monuments Preservation Service took charge of it, most of the building blocks were incorrectly placed, the west side leaned by 4.5 centimetres and oxidation had penetrated to the lower, archaic-era temple. The placing of a metallic grate made of stainless steel, a change not originally envisaged as part of the restoration, was one of the factors that delayed delivery of the monument.



Other causes of delay were two further studies, one concerning the positioning of the slabs making up the frieze and another on the construction of the marble lion heads on the cyma, something done for the first time on the Acropolis. The temple of the 'Wingless Nike' stands in the southwestern corner of the Acropolis, where in Mycenaean times there was a turret protecting the entrance to the Acropolis. The temple was built between 426-421 B.C. based on a plan by Kallikrates and is the successor of earlier temples dedicated to "victorious Athena" or Athena Nike. The temple was first described as that of the 'Nike Apteros' (wing-less victory) by Pausanias, who described the cult statue of Athena as lacking wings -- so that victory could never leave the pre-eminent Greek city-state of antiquity.



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Canadian clubs sweep 5th Annual Hellenic Soccer Tournament Championships

5th Annual Hellenic Soccer Tournament - Schaumburg, Illinois, USA - September 3, 4 & 5, 2010

Toronto Hellas Football Club (Men’s Open Competitive Division), Olympic Flame “Alexander The Great” (Men’s Open Division), and PAOK Hellas (Men’s Over 40 Division) were crowned Hellenic Soccer Tournament Champions.



Hellenic Soccer Tournament action:Hellas Soccer Club and Hellenic United Athletic Club

Olympic Park in Schaumburg, Illinois, USA (near Chicago) was the site chosen for the 5th Annual Hellenic Soccer Tournament. The battle for the undisputed North American Amateur Hellenic Soccer Tournament championship included 23 teams representing 9 cities (Chicago, Gary, New York, Ottawa, Scarborough, Toronto, Thornhill, Windsor, Winnipeg) from 2 different countries (Canada and USA). Other than the opening night on Friday September 3, 2010 where gusty winds made spectators reach out for their fall gear the rest of the tournament was enjoyed as perfect fall weather.

FINAL STANDINGS



Olympic Flame “Alexander The Great” Men’s Open Champions

Division - Men’s Open Competitive

1. Toronto Hellas Football Club - Toronto, Ontario, Canada
2. Hellas Soccer Club - Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
3. Windsor Hellenic Football Club - Windsor, Ontario, Canada
4. Hellenic United Athletic Club - Chicago, Illinois, USA
5. Greek American Atlas - New York, New York, USA
6. CKS Warta - Chicago, Illinois, USA

Division- Men’s Open



PAOK Hellas Men’s Open Over-40 Champions


The Men’s Open Competitive Division championship crown went to Toronto Hellas Football Club from Toronto, Ontario, Canada after the second-time participant (Over-30 division last year) beat 2007 Hellenic Soccer Tournament champions Hellas Soccer Club from Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada in penalties (7-6) after the regular period had ended in a 2-2 tie.

The Men’s Open Division championship crown went to Olympic Flame “Alexendar The Great” from Toronto, Ontario, Canada after the second -time participant (joining of last year’s champions Olympic Flame F.I.S.A. and Alexander The Great clubs) beat Athletic Club Halsted from Chicago, Illinois, USA with a score of 3-1.

The Men’s Over 40 Division championship crown went to PAOK Hellas from Toronto, Ontario, Canada after the first -time participant gathered 15 points in the overall standings table for the Over-40 division.

The Men’s Over 50 division featured two games with teams from Chicago, USA (OACA Olympic Spirit) and Toronto, Canada (Toronto Hellenics Football Club). Both teams were announced as co-champions in that division.

The 5th Annual Hellenic Soccer Tournament was concluded on Sunday, September 5th, 2010 with an the on-field awards ceremony. Prizes were awarded to the winners in the presence of club representatives.




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2. Athletic Club Halsted - Chicago, Illinois, USA
3. Hellenic United “Blue” - Chicago, Illinois, USA
4. Skala Messinias - Chicago, Illinois, USA
5. Hellenic United “White” - Chicago, Illinois, USA
6. GREEKSOCER.COM - Chicago, Illinois, USA
7. Thyella Football Club - Chicago, Illinois, USA
8. York Region Hellenics - Thornhill, Ontario, Canada

Division - Men’s Over 40

1. PAOK Hellas - Toronto, Ontario, Canada
2. O.A.C.A. Olympic Spirit - Chicago, Illinois, USA
3. Hellenic United Athletic Club - Chicago, Illinois, USA
4. Ottawa Hellenic Football Club - Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
5. N.Y. Olympiakos Football Club - New York, New York, USA
6. Illiana United Football Club - Gary, Indiana, USA
7. Toronto Hellenic Soccer Club - Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Division - Men’s Over 50

1. O.A.C.A. Olympic Spirit - Chicago, Illinois, USA
1. Toronto Hellenic Soccer Club - Toronto, Ontario, Canada

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Fun stuff to think about

Stewardesses is the longest word typed with only the left hand. And **'lollipop** is the longest word typed with your right hand. (Bet you tried this out mentally, didn't you?)

No word in the English language rhymes with **month, orange, silver, or purple.**

'Dreamt' is the only English word that ends in the letters 'mt'. (Are you doubting this?)

Our eyes are always the same size from birth, but our **nose** and **ears** never stop growing.

The sentence: 'The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog' uses every letter of the alphabet. (Now, you KNOW you're going to try this out for accuracy, right?)

The words **'racecar,' 'kayak' and 'level'** are the same whether they are read left to right or right to left (palindromes). (Yep, I knew you were going to 'do' this one.)

There are only four words in the English language which end in **'dous': tremendous, horrendous, stupendous, and hazardous.** (You're not possibly doubting this, are you ?)

There are two words in the English language that have all five vowels in order: **'abstemious' and 'facetious.'** (Yes, admit it, you are going to say, a e i o u)

TYPEWRITER is the longest word that can be made using the letters only on one row of the keyboard. (All you typists are going to test this out)

A cat has 32 muscles in each ear. A goldfish has a memory span of three seconds (Some days that's about what my memory span is.)

A **'jiffy'** is an actual unit of time for 1/100th of a second.

A **shark** is the only fish that can blink with both eyes.

A **snail** can sleep for three years. (I know some people that could do this too!)

Almonds are a member of the peach family.

An **ostrich's** eye is bigger than its brain. (I know some people like that also . Actually I know A LOT of people like this!)

Babies are born without kneecaps. They don't appear until the child reaches 2 to 6 years of age.

February 1865 is the only month in recorded history not to have a full moon.

In the last 4,000 years, no new animals have been domesticated.

If **the population of China** walked past you, 8 abreast, the line would never end because of the rate of reproduction.

Leonardo Da Vinci invented the **scissors**

Peanuts are one of the ingredients of dynamite!

Rubber bands last longer when refrigerated.

The average person's **left hand** does 56% of the typing.

The **cruise liner, QE 2,** moves only six inches for each gallon of diesel that it burns.

The microwave was invented after a researcher walked by a radar tube and a chocolate bar melted in his pocket. (Good thing he did that.)

The **winter of 1932** was so cold that Niagara Falls froze completely solid.

There are more **chickens** than **people** in the world.

Winston Churchill was born in a ladies' room during a dance.

Women blink nearly twice as much as men. Now you know more than you did before!!

Pope Benedict in England

The Pope says that religion is 'marginalised' during his speech in Westminster Hall.

The Pope has warned that religion - and Christianity in particular - is "being marginalised" around the world. His comments came in his keynote speech to UK MPs, senior members of British society, and religious leaders at Westminster Hall in central London.

Pope Benedict XVI warned that there were some people who wanted to see "the voice of religion be silenced". He returned to the subject in a service at Westminster Abbey, asking



Christians to speak out about their faith.

His speech at Westminster Hall as "a rallying call, and a plea - for religion not to be squeezed out by secular society". The Pope was speaking as a sixth man was arrested as counter-terrorism detectives investigate an alleged threat to Pope Benedict XVI's visit. In his speech at Westminster Hall, the Pope called on those in attendance to seek ways to promote faith "at every level of national life".

He added: "I cannot but voice my concern at the increasing marginalisation of religion, particularly of Christianity, that is taking place in some quarters, even in nations which place a great emphasis on tolerance.

"There are those who would advocate that the voice of religion be silenced, or at least relegated to the purely private sphere. "There are those who argue that the public celebration of festivals such as Christmas should be discouraged, in the questionable belief that it might somehow offend those of other religions or none."

At the service celebrated jointly with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, at Westminster Abbey, the Pope said: "in a society which has become increasingly indifferent or even hostile to the Christian message", believers were "all the more compelled to give a joyful and convincing account" of their faith. He also shook incense over the tomb of Ed-

ward the Confessor - regarded as a saint by both Churches. Following the service, the Pope travelled back to the home of Papal Nuncio - his official representative in the UK - in Wimbledon, south-west London.

'Deep friendship'

Earlier, the Pope met Dr Williams at Lambeth Palace - a meeting attended by Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops from different parts of the UK.

This was one of the most important speeches of Pope Benedict's papacy and he used it to warn the very health of democracy in Britain was being jeopardised by the marginalisation of religion. His essential message was that democracy relies on the use of reason but that human reasoning was being distorted by ideology and changing social fashions.

The Pope insisted reason needed to be judged against the unchanging teaching offered by religion - based as it was on "natural law", the fundamental nature of people. This was a dramatic attempt by Pope Benedict to force civic leaders to question the essential working of a democracy they have taken for granted would operate for the good of all.

His aim was to halt what he sees as the trend for governments to legislate to try to govern people's beliefs as well as their behaviour. It comes at a time when Anglican moves towards appointing women bishops have unsettled relations with Rome.

But the Pope said he wanted to focus on the "deep friendship" between the two churches rather than their differences. The Lambeth Palace meeting marked the first time a Pope has met the Archbishop at his official residence. It was viewed as an important event more than 40 years after official talks began about possible reunification of the two churches.

Divisions remain over Roman Catholic opposition to the ordination of women priests. Meanwhile the Church of England's General Synod left the way open for appointing women bishops at its meeting in July. The Vatican angered many supporters of women's ordination by describing it as a "grave crime" to be dealt with in the same process as sex abuse, though it denied it was equating the two.

Dr Williams said in his opening remarks that the Pope was "most welcome" at Lambeth Palace. He then praised the pontiff's "consistent and penetrating analysis of the state of European society". As the Pope left Lambeth Palace to travel the short distance to Westminster Hall in his Popemobile, thousands of people lined the streets. At one point he stopped the vehicle to bless a baby that was handed up to him.

Tight lips as Middle East peace talks rumble on

With talks now well under way, the Americans are working hard to stop information leaking out of the conference rooms. The statements that have been released are bland, positive without minimising the problems ahead. We are told that the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas are "getting down to business", tackling the tough

raelis are sounding more flexible than a week ago, but they are still ruling out an extension to the freeze.

There is a sense among some Israelis and some Palestinians - and also in the Obama White House - that time is running out". Negotiations first started almost 20 years ago. All of them have failed, although generally speaking each individual failure left



issues upfront.

Atmospherics are well managed. Mr Netanyahu flew a Palestinian flag when President Abbas came to his official residence in Jerusalem. The Americans conclude that both men want a peace deal.

So does all that mean that this new peace process will work? Probably not. At the moment the odds are against it.

Most people in the region are very pessimistic, including some who are close to Mr Abbas and Mr Netanyahu. Before the Washington summit where the talks were inaugurated one such person told me that it would all be a complete waste of time.

These talks could collapse before they get going properly. A partial Israeli freeze on building for Jews in the occupied West Bank runs out at the end of this month. The Palestinians say that if the freeze is not renewed they will walk away from the table. The Is-

raelis are sounding more flexible than a week ago, but they are still ruling out an extension to the freeze.

There is a sense among some Israelis and some Palestinians - and also in the Obama White House - that time is running out". Negotiations first started almost 20 years ago. All of them have failed, although generally speaking each individual failure left

something on which to build next time round.

Israelis and Palestinians are pessimistic because they have had their hopes raised too often, and because there is a very obvious gap between them on the big issues. Will Israel allow the Palestinians to have a capital in Jerusalem? What will Palestinian refugees get? How much land will the Palestinians get for a state?

And what kind of state? Properly sovereign - or with Israel controlling the borders, the airspace, and the water aquifers?

Israel is demanding recognition as a Jewish state. Palestinians point out that around one-fifth of Israeli citizens are Arabs, not Jews. Even if they can make a deal, it is doubtful whether they could deliver it. Mr Netanyahu and Mr Abbas both have serious domestic political constraints.

Mr Netanyahu has a coalition government reliant, for now anyway, on parties that are

against making concessions to the Palestinians.

Mr Abbas is politically weak. He does not speak for Gaza. It is controlled by Hamas, which says the talks are a trick, and that they would not have come even had they been asked.



The Americans want a deal, badly. President Barack Obama is pushing harder and earlier in his term than his two predecessors.

He appointed his Middle East envoy, Senator George Mitchell on his second day in office. Mr Mitchell's favourite rebuke to the pessimists is to recall that during his time as a peace envoy in Northern Ireland, they had

700 days of failure and one of success.

Senator Mitchell is counselling patience. But there is a sense among some Israelis and some Palestinians - and also in the Obama White House - that time is running out.

The secular leadership of the PLO, which has failed so far to deliver independence, can feel the hot breath of political Islam. So can the Americans. Extreme Jewish religious nationalists are also entrenched in some Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank.

Some say that Mr Netanyahu, in his second stint as prime minister, wants a peace deal to be his legacy. One highly respected Israeli journalist has suggested that he is becoming an Israeli Gorbachev - put into power to safeguard an empire, only to dismantle it.

Others believe that Mr Netanyahu is more concerned with stopping Iran becoming a nuclear power, even if that means war. This theory says he is only making the right noises about peace with the Palestinians to get closer to Mr Obama for when he needs him on Iran.

We'll see. This process is supposed to produce an agreement in a year.