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Turkey bans all Syrian flights over its territory

Syrian planes have been banned from Turkish air space, the Turkish foreign ministry has announced. The ban follows similar restrictions imposed by Syria, after a Syrian plane alleged to be carrying Russian munitions was intercepted by Turkey.

Turkey's ban came in on Saturday night and was communicated to Syria, but was only made public on Sunday. It applies to civilian aircraft, as military aircraft were already de facto banned, a ministry official said.

The Syrian move followed Turkey's interception on Wednesday of a Syrian jet, which Turkish warplanes forced to land in Ankara. Turkish officials confiscated what they described as munitions bound for Syria's defence ministry - an allegation disputed by Damascus.

At the time, Turkey warned its own civilian airlines to avoid Syrian air space as a precaution. Until last year, Turkey and Syria were close allies, says the BBC's James Reynolds, near the Turkey-Syria border. Now the only things that they still share are a border of 500 miles and an increasing sense of mistrust, our correspondent says.

In June Syria shot down a Turkish warplane, it said by accident, after the jet crossed into Syrian airspace. Now those same skies will be watched even more closely, our correspondent adds.

Sparks between neighbours

Tensions have been recently rising between the two countries after a series of cross-border incidents. Last week, there were several days of firing across the border after five Turkish civilians were killed by Syrian shelling. Turkey's government has backed the Syrian opposition and called for the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad. While Turkey may not be at war with Syria, correspondents say it is now increasingly involved in its neighbour's conflict.

On Saturday, the UN-Arab League envoy for Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, held talks in Turkey, meeting Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu to hear Turkey's perspective on the crisis. Meanwhile Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan told a conference in Istanbul that the UN's failure to act in Syria gave President Bashar al-Assad the green light to kill tens or hundreds of people every day.

President Assad's government accuses Turkey, along with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, of arming the rebels. However, Syria has said it is ready to set up a joint committee to oversee security on the border.

Its foreign ministry said it had been discussing with diplomats from Russia, a key ally, the idea of a Syrian-Turkish security committee to avoid misunderstandings at the border, which would establish a "mechanism for surveillance of the border while respecting national sovereignty".

On Sunday there were artillery attacks in the contested northern city of Aleppo for a second day, following the deaths of at least two people there on Saturday, according to Syrian opposition activists. The Syrian army was reported to have regained control of a historic mosque in the city after fierce clashes with rebels. Clashes were also reported between Syrian troops and rebels near the northwestern town of Maaret al-Numan, where the fighting was for control of a highway linking Damascus to Aleppo.

Austrian Felix Baumgartner has broken the record for the highest ever skydive by jumping out of a balloon 128,000ft (24 miles, 39km) above New Mexico.

The 43-year-old was hoping also to break the sound barrier during his descent - although that mark awaits confirmation. Video cameras relayed the moment Baumgartner stepped from his balloon capsule to begin his fall to Earth. It took just under 10 minutes for him to reach the desert surface below. Only the last few thousand feet were negotiated by parachute. Once down, he fell to his knees and raised his fist in triumph. Helicopter recovery teams were on hand moments later.

Unofficially, the Austrian jumped from 128,097ft (24.2 miles; 39km). He fell for four minutes and 19 seconds, reaching a speed of 706mph (1,137km/h). These figures will undoubtedly change slightly once the chest pack information has been properly assessed.

There was concern early in the dive that he was in trouble. Baumgartner was supposed to get himself into a delta position - head down, arms back - as soon as possible after leaving his capsule. But the video showed him tumbling over and over. Eventually, however, he was able to use his great experience, from more than 2,500 career skydives, to correct his fall and get into a stable configuration.

Even before this drama, it was thought the mission might have to be aborted. As he went through last-minute checks inside the capsule, it was found that a heater for his visor was not working. This meant the visor fogged up as he exhaled. "This is very serious, Joe," he told retired US Air Force Col Joe Kittinger, whose records he was attempting to break, and who was acting as his radio link in mission control at Roswell airport.

Baumgartner's efforts have finally toppled records that have stood for more than 50 years. The previous highest, farthest, and longest freefall was made by Col Kittinger, who leapt from a helium envelope in 1960. His altitude was 102,800ft (31.3km). (His mark for the longest freefall remains intact; he fell for more than four and a half minutes before deploying his chute.)

Why did Mrs. Merkel come to Greece?

One of the first tasks young Otto von Wittelsbach and his regency council undertook shortly after the Great Powers appointed him king of Greece in 1833 was to try to subdue the people of Mani. Greece's first head of state, Ioannis Capodistrias, had met his death two years earlier after attempting to bring some of the Maniots into line over their refusal to pay taxes. The newly-arrived Germans launched three military operations involving thousands of Bavarians soldiers marching into the southern Peloponnese. They all proved fruitless as the wily and determined Maniots made best use of their limited resources and inferior numbers.

After failing to subdue the People of Mani, King Otto and his Bavarians decided on a more nuanced approach. They dispatched a Bavarian diplomat called Max Feder to the area who convinced many of the local kapetans, or clan chiefs, to join a new military unit consisting just of locals that would be responsible for policing their own area. It proved a significant move in bridging the gap between the Maniots unruliness and the emerging establishment.

For the last three years, much of Europe - Germany, in particular - has looked upon Greeks as the continent's Maniots, refusing to pay their share and follow the rules. Like the Bavarian's forays, the European's tactics have not had the desired effect. Into this melee, steps Angela Merkel. Until recently, the instigator of several verbal assaults on Greece, the German chancellor now appears to be opting for a diplomatic route. Her recent surprise trip to Athens looked like an attempt to bridge differences, an effort to try a little kindness and tact.

Samaras and Merkel think the visit was a good idea. From Samaras's side it ended up an opportunity to increase his legitimacy both at home and abroad. For the New Democracy chief this was the moment that he can truly claim to have completed his political rehabilitation. Ostracized by many European leaders, including those on the center right, due to his opposition to the austerity measures adopted in the first two years of the EU-IMF program, Samaras has been winning over his peers since being elected in June. "He's the best port we have in this storm," a European Commission official told the Wall Street Journal last week. Merkel's opinion of Samaras has changed substantially and she was impressed by the Greek delegation that visited Berlin in August. There was no way Samaras could pass up the opportunity to host Merkel in Athens and prove to his critics at home and abroad that he has travelled the road to redemption.

For Merkel, the purpose of Tuesday's visit was a little more practical. All the indications are that over the last few weeks she has ditched her equivocal position on Greek euro membership for a clear line in favour of keeping Greece in. This position is at odds with the views of some members of her party and government. By visiting Greece, Merkel is sending a clear message to her colleagues that backing its continued membership of the eurozone is now the party and government line. It is an invitation to doubters to back her or keep quiet.

With the countdown to next year's federal elections underway, Merkel is also hoping for a piece of one-upmanship on the Christian Democratic Union's main rivals, the Social Democratic Party, which has been highly critical of the way the chancellor has handled the Greek problem and has maintained a much clearer position throughout the crisis in favour of Greece remaining in the eurozone. It is probably not a coincidence that Merkel's visit comes only days after the SPD, which trails the CDU by almost 10 percentage points in the polls, named former finance minister Peer Steinbrueck as its candidate to run against the chancellor. In one of his first interviews after winning the nomination, Steinbrueck told Die Welt newspaper that Greece should be given more time to complete its fiscal consolidation. "We cannot tighten the screws any further," he said. "And the chancellor must finally tell the German people the truth: Greece will not be able to borrow money on the capital markets in the coming seven or eight years. We will have to help it until then," he added.

The prospect of Germany having to help Greece for many more years is another reason behind Merkel's visit. It has become increasingly clear over the last few weeks that a potentially unbridgeable gap is developing between the International Monetary Fund and the eurozone over how to proceed with the Greek crisis. The IMF is insisting that an official sector debt restructuring be incorporated into the Greek program but many of the Europeans do not want to contemplate such a move at this stage. For Germany's politicians in particular, the prospect of having to explain to a domestic audience which has largely negative view of Greece that there is a need to write off part of what it owes to its eurozone partners and the European Central Bank is anathema, especially now the election jostling has started.

This means the eurozone is nearing a make-or-break moment with respect to Greece. A failure to put restructuring on the table now will lead to the IMF extracting itself from the Greek program. Although it contributes a relatively small part of the bailout, its withdrawal would change the dynamics of the process and put extra pressure on the Europeans.

Decisions about an extension to Greece's fiscal adjustment period, a second restructuring, the role of the European Stability Mechanism in tackling Greece's runaway debt and how a possible Greek financing gap might be bridged are among those that must be taken in the coming months. As has been the case throughout the past three years, Germany's leanings on these issues will act as the eurozone's metronome. Somewhere in this process, Greece and its partners have to arrive at a formula that gives it a chance of economic survival.

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Heaven is real, says neurosurgeon who claims to have visited the afterlife

Dr. Eben Alexander claims to have visited the afterlife (Twitter)Dr. Eben Alexander has taught at Harvard Medical School and has earned a strong reputation as a neurosurgeon. And while Alexander says he's long called himself a Christian, he never held deeply religious beliefs or a pronounced faith in the afterlife.



But after a week in a coma during the fall of 2008, during which his neocortex ceased to function, Alexander claims he experienced a life-changing visit to the afterlife, specifically heaven.

"According to current medical understanding of the brain and mind, there is absolutely no way that I could have experienced even a dim and limited consciousness during my time in the coma, much less the hyper-vivid and completely coherent odyssey I underwent," Alexander writes in the cover story of this week's edition of Newsweek.

So what exactly does heaven look like?

Alexander says he first found himself floating above clouds before witnessing, "transparent, shimmering beings arced across the sky, leaving long, streamer like lines behind them."

He claims to have been escorted by an unknown female companion and says he communicated with these beings through a method of correspondence that transcended language.

Alexander says the messages he received from those beings loosely translated as:

"You are loved and cherished, dearly, forever."

"You have nothing to fear."

"There is nothing you can do wrong."

From there, Alexander claims to have traveled to "an immense void, completely dark, infinite in size, yet also infinitely comforting." He believes this void was the home of God.

After recovering from his meningitis-induced coma, Alexander says he was reluctant to share his experience with his colleagues but found comfort inside the walls of his church. He's chronicled his experience in a new book, "Proof of Heaven: A neurosurgeon's journey into the afterlife," which will be published in late October

"I'm still a doctor, and still a man of science every bit as much as I was before I had my experience," Alexander writes. "But on a deep level I'm very different from the person I was before, because I've caught a glimpse of this emerging picture of reality. And you can believe me when I tell you that it will be worth every bit of the work it will take us, and those who come after us, to get it right."

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Mayor of the Month for October 2012

Yiannis Boutaris

Mayor of Thessaloniki, Greece

If all Greek politicians were like the Mayor of Thessaloniki, Greece would not be in the economic and financial mess it is in today, German newspapers commented after Yiannis Boutaris visited Berlin in February 2012. Only half-joking, the mayor told reporters that his country’s economic crisis helped him to change attitudes in his city. “Since there is no money to buy votes, politicians actually have to produce results.”



Yiannis Boutaris was elected as mayor of Thessaloniki in Greece in November 2010. After a successful business career Boutaris went in to politics to achieve radical change in the city. His reforms and initiatives have drawn praise from officials in the EU and other institutions involved with the intervention measures to support the economy, notably in his efforts to control staff costs and to make public services work better.

The mayor was elected in November 2010 after a very close contest. Although he was backed by centre-left PASOK in 2010, Yiannis Boutaris has never been a member of the party and secured their backing as he was seen as

the only politician who could break the Conservative stranglehold on city hall. New Democracy had ruled Thessaloniki for decades and their popularity remained strong despite criminal investigations into missing funds of up to 30 million euros. The previous mayor Vassilis Papageorgopoulos is amongst those who have now been charged with offences.

Mayor Boutaris was born in Thessaloniki in 1942. His father was winemaker Stelios Boutaris and young Yiannis went in to the family business after securing degrees in Chemistry from the University of Thessaloniki and in Oenology. He made an unsuccessful bid for mayor in the 2006 election. He has been a member of the City Council since 2002. Although he was 68 when he won the mayoralty he made a point of appointing deputies in their 40s with professional backgrounds and without political affiliations. One of these is Vassilas Kappas, who developed a plan which has reduced the number of directorates from 32 to 20. The mayor has said in interviews that his approach has been to choose deputies in their forties and then to give them a real range of responsibilities and a relatively real rein. The population within the boundaries of the municipality of Thessaloniki is 322,000 though nearly 800,000 live in the urban area and in much of the mayors’ strategic and international work he is, in effect, acting on behalf of all of them. The city had debts of around 100 million euros when he took office. He admits he failed to keep his election promise to get the streets clean in his first year. The mayors’ interest in learning from Germany in this difficult period for relations between the two Euro-zone members has brought him condemnation from some parts of the Greek media and public but Boutaris is unrepentant and has been happy to work with Hans-Joachim Fuchtel, the Minister appointed by Chancellor Merkel to oversee the distribution of EU bailout funds in the country. During the long economic crisis in Greece Mayor Boutaris has become a magnet for international journalists covering the euro-zone story and has been cited by EU officials as an example of the kind of leader the country desperately needs.

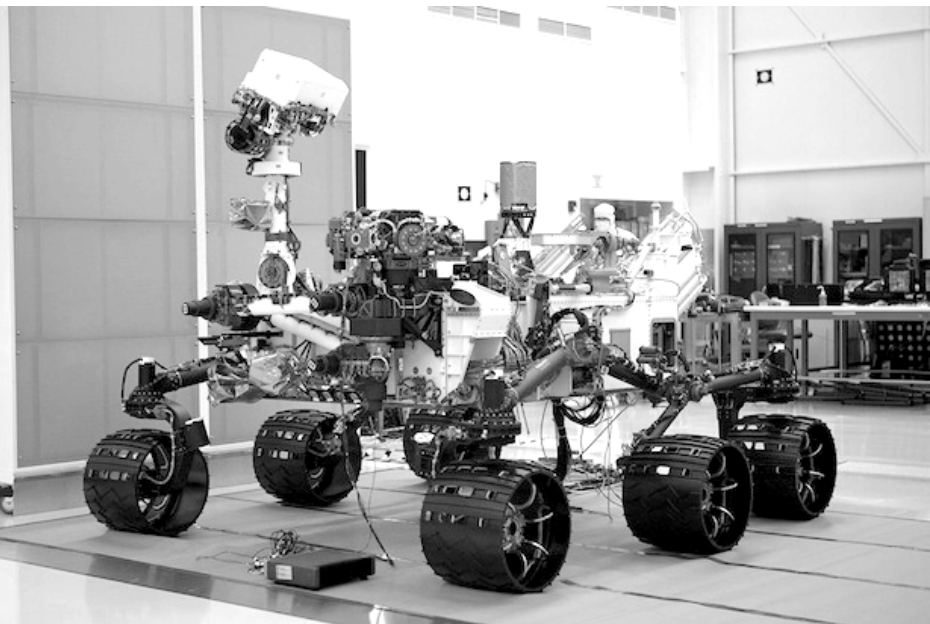
City Council meetings are now televised. The most startling reform implemented in the first year, at least to those used to Northern European methods, has been to produce a job description for every employee. Yiannis Boutaris considers Barcelona to be a model for the re-invention and management of port cities.

Weather On Mars

Surprisingly Warm, Curiosity Rover Finds

NASA’s Mars rover Curiosity is enjoying some nice, warm weather on the Red Planet — and spring hasn’t even come to its landing site yet.

Curiosity’s onboard weather station, which is called the Remote Environment Monitoring Station (REMS), has measured air temperatures as high as 43 degrees



Fahrenheit (6 degrees Celsius) in the afternoon. And temperatures have climbed above freezing during more than half of the Martian days, or sols, since REMS was turned on, scientists said. These measurements are a bit unexpected, since it’s still late winter at Gale Crater, the spot 4.5 degrees south of the Martian equator where Curiosity touched down on Aug. 5.

Curiosity’s main goal is to determine if the Gale area is, or ever was, capable of supporting microbial life. Most researchers think present-day Mars is too dry and cold to host life as we know it, but they may have to rethink some of their assumptions if temperatures climb considerably through the spring and summer.

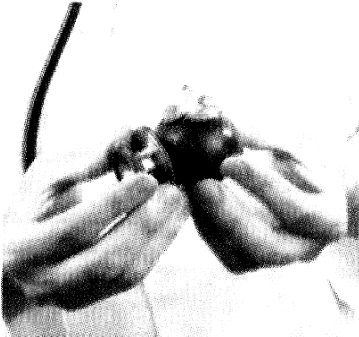
If this warm trend carries on into summer, we might even be able to foresee temperatures in the 20s [Celsius], and that would be really exciting from a habitability point of view. In the daytimes, we could see temperatures high enough for liquid water on a regular basis. But it’s too soon to tell whether that will happen or whether these warm temperatures are just a blip.

While Curiosity’s days are relatively pleasant weather-wise, the same can’t be said for the rover’s nights. Air temperatures drop dramatically after the sun goes down, plunging as low as minus 94 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 70 Celsius) just before dawn, scientists said. Such big swings occur because the effects of solar heating are much more pronounced on Mars than they are on Earth. The Red Planet’s surface is much drier, and its atmosphere is just 1 percent as thick as Earth’s.

REMS measurements also suggest that atmospheric pressure is on the rise at Gale Crater, researchers said. This information is in line with mission scientists’ expectations.

Health Journal

Feeding the Mind for a Healthier Tomorrow



Mangosteen

A ‘Royal’ Fruit

Mangosteen juice is a revolutionary development made of the whole fruit puree of the mangosteen. Although this fruit is foreign to most people living in the temperate Western hemisphere, the mangosteen is a fruit prized above all others in the tropical countries of Southeast Asia. In fact, it is often referred to as the “Queen of Fruits” or the “Food of the Gods” in these areas of the world. So why does this mysterious fruit merit such “royal” praise and adoration?

The mangosteen has been prized for thousands of years because of the role it played in ancient Southeast Asian medicine. Traditionally, natural healers used it to help fight infection, control fever and aid in a number of other health conditions.

The mature fruit has a unique and unusual appearance. It is roughly the size of a tangerine with a dark purple rind that is rather thick and tough. Encased within this protective coating is a snow-white fruit that separates into wedges, much like an orange.

The taste of the mangosteen’s flesh is exquisite and unique, with a sweet, mild flavor that appeals to the masses. However, the mangosteen is a very delicate fruit that does not transport well, which has prevented many people around the world from enjoying its many benefits.

Modern science has examined the mangosteen for its beneficial compounds, and those that receive the most scientific attention are the xanthones. Xanthones are biologically active, natural chemical substances found in only a few tropical plants. They are potent antioxidants that demonstrate a variety of health benefits. The mangosteen houses more than three dozen xanthones, two of which (*alpha-mangostin* and *gamma-mangostin*) have been the focus of numerous recent studies.

Results from these laboratory experiments demonstrate that the xanthones found in the mangosteen plant show activity against inflammation^{3,4}, bacteria⁵, fungus⁶, histamine⁷ (which cause allergies), and cancer⁸, among other maladies. One of the scientific discoveries is that xanthones inhibit the oxidation of low-density lipoprotein (LDL)⁹. Oxidized LDL is one of the root causes of atherosclerosis and heart disease.

Mangosteen is the greatest known source of these powerful xanthones and only recently has the fruit become commercially available in North America. Bottling and preserving its juice has now made it possible for anyone to partake of the medicinal power found in mangosteen. This sweet-tasting juice continues to benefit thousands as it spreads around the world.

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“Has anyone seen my child?”

It is a drama that families hope they will never have to face: the disappearance of a child. Amid the panic and the stress it is crucial that a support system is quickly made available, on top of whatever action the police may take. And for help organisations on the ground, it is a key part of children's rights.

Some cases receive a lot of media attention; others become a lonely struggle for families desperate for help. An estimated one million children go missing every year in the European Union. These include runaways, criminal abductions, those abducted by a parent, the lost or injured, as well as missing unaccompanied migrant children.

Many of the operators are members of Missing Children Europe, an umbrella organisation that has been pushing for the single, dedicated number. Hopes are high that the number of cases solved will now increase. Despite its financial troubles, Greece is one of the most active countries when it comes to having systems in place for when children disappear. Emergency services and volunteers are geared up to be quickly mobilised when the hotline receives an alert. Right On spoke to one mother who rang the number when her four-year-old boy wandered away from a holiday home on the island of Andros last summer. After rescue teams and local residents were scrambled, the child was located several hours later safe and sound.

The rescued boy's mother told euronews: “At first I felt panic, but the young woman I spoke to on the hotline reassured me and told me to keep calm, saying they would help find the boy as quickly as possible.

“Gradually I tried to cooperate with them as I was in a terrible state psychologically. I thought I would never see him again, never find him.” The organisation that runs Greece's hotline, The Smile of the Child, was behind the setting up of a missing children response team, to have rescuers on the ground in the early stages of a disappearance. Whether it is the

police or the hotline that receives the alert first, the aim is to waste no time in sharing the information.

Vassilis Orfanos, Coordinator of the Missing Children Response Team, said: “It is very important for us, whenever a child has gone missing, to get notified very very quickly, so we can respond to the incident as fast as we can.” Greece also has a public alert system for suspected abductions, flashing up on television and the likes of motorway signs. The Greek hotline received almost 6,000 calls in 2011 and dealt with the cases of 120 missing children. Eight of those have still not been found. But cooperation seems to be the key.

Costas Yannopoulos, Chairman of “The Smile of the Child” told Right On: “We are uniting our forces. That has been our motto, the message we want to show. We are combining forces for the children.

“The Smile of the Child, the Red Cross, Greek Rescue Teams, the Police, the Fire Service, the Port Authorities, Civil Defence – all together with a single goal.”

That message is echoed by the police. A fully automated computer system has been established, allowing the centralising of information, which can then be spread in different formats within minutes.

Captain Panagiotis Papantonis from the Missing Persons Unit of the Greek Police told euronews: “This initiative is very important, and it's very good that we were the first country to establish this service now operating in Greece.

“It has helped us in many disappearance cases, because while the parents may not have given us some piece of information, we received it anonymously through the hotline.”

And sometimes just one small clue from the public is all that is needed to bring a missing child home.”

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NEWS FROM GREECE

As troika talks drag on, problems rattle government

Prime Minister Antonis Samaras speaking at the 125th anniversary conference of the International Herald Tribune in Paris on Thursday.

As Finance Ministry officials labored on with tough talks with troika officials on Thursday on an elusive 13.5-billion-euro austerity package, government officials struggled to deal with a tide of problems shaking the fragile coalition, including a burgeoning crisis within socialist PASOK.

The latest meeting between troika chiefs and Finance Minister Yannis Stournaras ended after just 45 minutes amid reports that the two sides had failed to agree on where some 2.5 billion euros of spending cuts should come from. Stournaras said his aim remained to reach a basic agreement before a Eurogroup summit on Monday.

Meanwhile a crisis was growing within PASOK following criticism from the leftist SYRIZA opposition but also from within the party against PASOK leader Evangelos Venizelos regarding his handling of a memory stick containing the names of some 2,000 Greeks being probed for tax evasion.

Venizelos defended his actions in a speech to his MPs during which he stressed that austerity measures could only be voted on in Parliament when a comprehensive package is agreed including an extension to

Greece's fiscal adjustment period

Another headache for the government was an unprecedented breach of security at the Defense Ministry by shipyard workers. The incident is said to have caused consternation among officials close to Prime Minister Antonis Samaras, who was in Paris for a conference organized by the International Herald Tribune.

Addressing the event, Samaras said a Greek euro exit would slash living standards by up to 70 percent and would be "disastrous" for the bloc. He said his government was "changing Greece at home and rebranding it abroad." But the messages from EU leaders on Thursday were not encouraging. German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble said all eurozone states with debt problems had made good progress with reforms apart from Greece, "which is in a particularly difficult situation." He added however that countries with problems should be given more time to reform.

Meanwhile European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi ruled out the prospect of rolling over Greek debt, saying that would constitute monetary financing, which is against the ECB's policy. Speaking later at the

IHT conference, Samaras had said it would be "very positive" if the ECB rolled over Greek bonds.

Ex-minister probed by financial crimes squad kills himself

Former Deputy Interior Minister Leonidas Tzanis, whose name is on a list of 36 politicians and public officials being probed by the Financial Crimes Squad (SDOE), was found dead at his home in Volos, central Greece, on Thursday. Tzanis reportedly hung himself. It is the first time a former member of the Greek government has killed himself.

Tzanis, a lawyer by trade, was elected as an MP in 1993, 1996, 2000 and 2004. He served as deputy interior minister between February 1999 and October 2001. He was married with two children. Tzanis's body was found in the basement of his house by his wife.

Tzanis's name is one of 36 on a list of public figures being investigated for a range of alleged corruption-related offenses, including tax evasion and illegal earnings. It was not clear what Tzanis was being probed for.

A number of high-profile politicians, including Parliament Speaker Evangelos Meimarakis, are on the list. Prosecutors are examining whether any of the suspects being probed should face charges.

Meimarakis returned to Parliament on Thursday and said that the House would ask for details of some 2,000 Greeks who were on another list, one containing the names of people with accounts in the Geneva branch of HSBC totaling nearly 1.5 billion euros. The data are at the center of a political row after it emerged that authorities had been in possession of the information since 2010 but failed to act.

In a separate development, the Finance Ministry said that it will be sending out over the next few days letters to some 15,000 Greeks who were found to have moved money abroad without declaring it to local tax authorities. Some 5 billion euros was not declared and the government hopes to collect 2.25 billion euros from the 15,000 depositors.

Lagarde's list exposes Greece

The way in which -- the Greek political class has dealt with the various lists of tax evasion suspects has been disastrous -- for the politicians and the country alike.

Authorities in other countries have investigated every available piece of evidence in a systematic but also discreet fashion. In the end, they either reach a settlement with the tax dodgers or impose harsh penalties on them.

The saga concerning the so-called "Lagarde list" -- which is said to contain the names of about 2,000 Greeks with deposits totaling some 1.5 billion euros in an HSBC branch in Geneva -- shows that a responsible reaction is not in the cards here.

Worse, foreign authorities will find it very hard to ever entrust sensitive data with the Greek government again after this shocking lack of professionalism.

The immaturity of the political system and the unchecked populism surrounding the infamous lists have tarnished the country's image abroad and provoked public opinion.

Bled dry and discouraged

By Nikos Xydakis

The cost-cutting measures due to be announced by the government, which entail additional taxes and cuts to salaries, will not be the last of their kind and will most certainly lead to more money leaving the market, a further drop in consumer demand, a deepening of the recession and more unemployment. What then is the point of horizontal cuts and the brutish taxation of the weak? The only argument put forward by the tripartite coalition government is that this is the only way to convince our foreign creditors that we can act responsibly so as to secure an extension to the fiscal adjustment program.

This rationale, which has been the driving force of every Greek government since 2010, has proven ineffective and is now even potentially dangerous. It is like a patient undergoing a succession of blood donations for experimental purposes in exchange for a bit of morphine. The economic hemorrhaging, however, is already causing serious symptoms in the whole of society; it magnifies and multiplies the country's systemic weaknesses and breeds new deadly diseases. Already, crucial parts of the state are showing serious signs of malfunction or even collapse: hospitals, schools, day-care centers, social security funds, tax offices, courts -- the list goes on and on.

The violent pauperization of the working and middle classes through horizontal cuts -- without equality, without offsetting measures and without a safety net -- is creating a frenzied herd mentality and a propensity to violence; it is breeding intense distrust in and abhorrence of the institutions of the state, it is turning the hardest-hit members of society to vigilantism and gradually making public space an arena for gang clashes.

The disheartening image of the ruling class -- the backstabbing, the vulgarity, the scandal, the spats, tiffs and insults, the complete disregard for due process and democratic standards.



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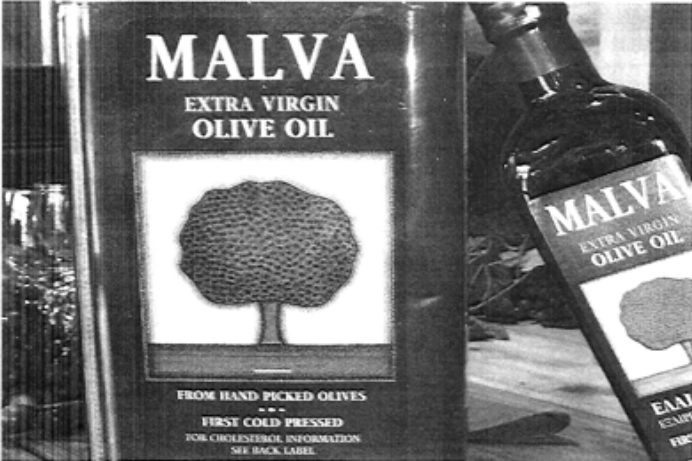
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Troika under fire

By Costas Iordanidis

There was no shortage of anger against the troika during the anti-austerity protests on Wednesday. The frustrated reaction came naturally and it was not fueled exclusively by the opposition parties. To be sure, the parties involved in Greece's coalition government had systematically stoked public anger against the troika over the past week. Even Yannis Stournaras, the country's finance minister, rebelled against the IMF envoy here, while the coalition's junior partners were even more vocal.

The fresh cuts, which are expected to hit state sector workers and pensioners



hard, could have been milder if the governments in power since May 2010 -- including the present one -- had taken action in other sectors, including clamping down on tax evasion and collecting outstanding debts to the state from the self-employed.

However, for decades the country has been ruled by corrupt politicians who either made generous contributions to the party coffers or helped win votes ahead of elections.

During the past few days, and while criticism of the troika's "insensitive" posturing was on the rise, the Wall Street Journal published an internal IMF report on Greece which said that a combination of dominant companies and excessive regulation that stifles competition in Greece's oil-refining industry is costing consumers here more than \$1 billion a year. We cannot judge the credibility of the report here. One safe conclusion, however, is that the troika has in the past couple of years established a network of contacts independent of Greece's authorities.

Skepticism toward Greece's political system remains. The government recently came up with the idea of creating free economic zones. The proposal met with reaction from a member of the troika. Although they don't have full knowledge of Greek realities, the representatives of Greece's creditors have realized that every special adjustment could favor some specific group at the expense of the common good.

It was not the Greek people who invited the troika here. The decision was made by the government of George Papandreou -- a decision that has committed the country for the decades to come. Some saw this development positively. What some people fail to see is that the troika is not interested in the survival of the political and economic elite which is mostly responsible for Greece's woes. Adjusting to European standards, regardless of the manner of adaptation, will bring about the undoing of the old system in all of its manifestations.

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US military death toll in Afghanistan reaches 2,000



Nato troops will withdraw by the end of 2014, but a number will remain to train Afghan security forces .The US military has suffered its 2,000th death in the Afghan war - with a suspected "insider" attack at a checkpoint in the east of the country.A US soldier and a foreign onractor were killed while two Afghan soldiers died and four were injured. The nationality of the contractor was not given immediately. Attacks by rogue elements in the Afghan security forces sharply ncreased this year, prompting the coalition to suspend joint operations this month.Requests for joint operations must now be approved by regional commanders.The American death toll goes back to the US-led invasion of Afghani- stan in 2001.

The rise of clean teeth



History of teeth-cleaning reaches as far back as 5000 BC, when Egyptians made tooth powder with ox hooves, myrrh, powdered and burnt eggshells, and pumice. Romans and Greeks also used tooth powder but added crushed bones and oyster shells. Toothpowder became available in England in 18th Century and included abrasive substances such as brick dust, crushed china, earthenware and cuttlefish. Bicarbonate of soda used for basis of most toothpowders and the poor applied this directly with fingers. William Addis credited with making first toothbrush in 1780 made from cattle bones and wild boar hair. First synthetic toothbrush developed in 1930s America.



Georgia's beautiful, subtropical Black Sea coast is once again drawing tourists from far and wide, and the government hopes focusing on gambling will help pull in visitors all year round.When you are in Batumi, it is hard to believe that this was once a corrupt and crime-ridden city, cut off from the rest of the country, and run as a personal fiefdom by a power-hungry strongman.