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The Coming Two Witnesses

Louis A. Palivos



As humanity approaches the coming of the Antichrist and the False Prophet, Almighty God will not leave the Faithful Church unprotected and uninformed. God will send two Prophets to give humanity one last chance to repent and to give the Faithful Church hope, in the face of intense prosecution. When will Almighty God send these two Prophets? This article will identify these two Prophets as probably Elijah (Elias) and Enoch! Why these two Prophets, because, “it’s appointed for men to die once.” Heb. 9:27. These two Prophets have not tasted death!

Holy Scripture

And I will give *power* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” These are the two olive trees and the two lamp stands standing before the God of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire. When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. Then *those* from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. Rev. 11:3-12 And it came to pass, when the Lord was going to take Elias with a whirlwind as it were into heaven, that Elias and Elisaie went out of Galgala. And it came to pass as they were going, they went on talking; and, behold, a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and it separated between them both; and Elias was taken up in a whirlwind as it were into heaven. II Kings 2:1, 11 And Enoch walked with God; and he *was not*, for God took him. Gen. 5:24. *the son of Methuselah, the son of*

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East Med Act a milestone in US foreign policy

KATERINA SOKOU



The Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act is a “historic, truly transformational development,” which places Greece, Cyprus and Israel on the front line of American policy in the Eastern Mediterranean.

In an interview with Kathimerini, American Jewish Committee (AJC) CEO David Harris and Hellenic American Leadership Council (HALC) Executive Director Endy Zemenides note the act’s importance in providing an institutional framework for significant developments in the region, namely the energy and security cooperation between the three countries.

Even as they stress that the legislation, which US President Donald Trump signed into law last week, is not aimed against Ankara, they note that in Congress “both Democrats and Republicans realize we can’t rely today on Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean.” And even as they agree that each of its provisions represents a tactical move, they also note that “as a whole it presents a new strategy” for the United States in the region, one made possible thanks to the leadership and advocacy of AJC and HALC, among others.

Up until a few weeks ago, the East Med Act was considered too ambitious to pass in Congress. How did this outcome come about?

Endy Zemenides: The East Med Act was indeed ambitious from the beginning but those that considered it too ambitious underestimated its chances. It all started with the members of Congress that came together to coauthor and introduce the act. Senators [Bob] Menendez and [Marco] Rubio, representatives [Gus] Bilirakis, [David] Cicilline and [Ted] Deutch are not only among the most active members of Congress on the region, but they all have a track record of working on a bipartisan basis and were all willing to exercise political capital to move this forward.

Then there was the broad coalition of civic groups advocating for the act. When it was first introduced, HALC’s members made thousands of phone calls and sent tens of thousands of emails to their own members of Congress. We set up meetings with senators and representatives in their home offices. Then the act became a legislative priority during the AJC’s Global Forum, where thousands of advocates spread across Capitol Hill lobbying for the act. Days later, the PSEKA [Cyprus and Hellenic Leadership] Conference advocated for the East Med Act. One month later, Christians United for Israel (CUFI) joined the coalition and made the act a

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- 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.

Greece is good, but Turkey is better



The simple fact that it was agreed in advance that Donald Trump and Kyriakos Mitsotakis would not hold a joint press briefing following their meeting on Tuesday in Washington was a clear indication of how the US president perceives Greek-American relations. It also underscores the justifiable fear in Athens of Trump’s impulsive behavior. Concern in Athens is augmented by the fact that Trump has made no secret of his admiration for Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whom he has in the past described as a “friend of mine” and “a hell of a leader.”

The American leader justified the behavior of the Turkish strongman, who snubbed NATO by purchasing Russia’s S-400 missile defense system despite objections by the Atlantic Alliance, putting the blame on the Obama administration for refusing to sell US Patriot missiles to Turkey.

Trump went as far as to praise Erdogan in public in the wake of Turkey’s incursion into northern Syria – a brazen military act that was in violation of international law.As this column has said before, if Trump has no qualms about sacrificing the Kurdish forces who allied with the United States in the war against the so-called Islamic State, then there is very little that other US allies which have not lost 11,000 troops on the battlefield (such as Greece) can hope for.

Worse, after the incomprehensible assassination – on Trump’s orders – of Iran’s most powerful military commander, General Qassem Soleimani, in a US drone strike, Turkey and its military bases have gained fresh significance. Should Iran deliver on its pledge to retaliate, the US must be in a position to respond forcefully. [Iran launched a missile attack on two Iraqi military bases hosting US-led coalition personnel as retribution for the US Soleimani’s killing last week. Trump said “all is well” following the attack and that he would make a statement on the situation on Wednesday.] To be sure, Trump has never appeared to underestimate Greece. On the contrary, he seems to appreciate the increased defense cooperation between Athens and Washington – which also resembles a guarantee as it helps offset a precious albeit unpredictable Ankara. However, Turkey and Erdogan’s stock has jumped through the roof in the Trump stock market. And amid impeachment proceedings, the US president will apparently do anything it takes to achieve his re-election in November. Mitsotakis’ meeting with Trump may have been successful. However, in light of recent developments, Athens’ complaints against Ankara’s provocations in the Aegean and its illegitimate agreements with Libya probably come second. Regrettably, as far as the White House is concerned these days, Greece is a good option but Turkey is better.

East Med Act a milestone in US foreign policy

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legislative priority. Dozens of meetings took place with members of Congress in DC and across the country over the summer. And then HALC and AJC members made a major push during the CHIA [Congressional Hellenic Israel Alliance] Advocacy Conference in October.

Not a single week passed this year in which some progress was not made on this act, and when combined with the regional developments which provided the backdrop to the policies contained in it, undeniable momentum was generated to get it across the finish line.

What does it signify for American foreign policy in the East Med?

David Harris: This is a historic, truly transformational development in United States foreign policy. Both Democrats and Republicans realize that we can’t rely today on Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean. America’s frontline in this strategically and economically vital region comprises Greece, Cyprus and Israel, as well as several Arab countries, beginning with Egypt and Jordan.

At the heart of the act is the impact of malign actors in the region at a time of deteriorating relations with Turkey. Is the imperative to support the partnership of America’s allies in the region a tactical or strategic move for the US?

DH: The East Med Act has several provisions and each one represents a tactical move. But as a whole it presents a new strategy. The US has long based its Eastern Mediterranean strategy on Turkey. The East Med Act is evidence of a shift in that strategy.

In Greece, a lot of emphasis was given on military cooperation and lifting the arms embargo on Cyprus. What do you consider as the most important provisions of the East Med Act for the region, and in particular for the trilateral partnership with Israel?

DH: The US – by lifting the Cyprus arms embargo – is rectifying an anarchic and unintentionally injurious law. Cyprus has time and again proven itself to be a true partner of the US – in combating terror, cooperating militarily and in supporting our partner Israel. Removing arms restrictions against Cyprus removes the ceiling on our relationship and allows cooperation to flourish.

EZ: David is right about the Cyprus arms embargo – its repeal along with the Republic of Cyprus entering the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program will allow the successful Greece-Cyprus-Israel trilateral into a true 3+1 with the United States on the security front. The provisions supporting regional energy diplomacy and authorizing the establishment of an Eastern Mediterranean Energy Center are equally important. The East Med Act is institutionalizing important trends and partnerships.

Still, President Trump continues to support Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan despite the delivery of the Russian S-400 missile defense system and his destabilizing policy in the region – in Syria, in Libya and towards Greece, Egypt and Cyprus. Will the president have to abide by the provisions of this act, or are we heading for a standoff with Congress?

DH: Turkey’s often counterproductive role in the region must be checked. Allies must be allies in words and deeds. And while we celebrate this major development, we must acknowledge sad moments and work that remains to be done. Despite bipartisan support in Congress to recognize the Armenian Genocide, the White House refuses to do the same. Why? Fear of Turkey, same as during the Obama era. The truth must not be sacrificed to political intimidation.

EZ: The East Med Act is not based on an anti-Turkey policy but on a new US policy in the region that deepens cooperation with reliable and democratic allies. Just like the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, there is room for Turkey at the table if it wants to be a constructive actor that plays by the rules that its neighbors agree to. But the days of letting Turkey write its own rules and have people turn a blind eye to its bullying in the region are over.

Islands on same footing as mainland, US envoy says



Inhabited islands, such as Crete, are on the same footing as mainland coastline in the delineation of marine zones, US Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt said Monday in response to questions from reporters about the recent maritime border agreement between Libya and Turkey that ignores the presense of the Greek island.

Pyatt described the Ankara-Tripoli deal as well as Turkish drilling for hydrocarbons off the coast of Cyprus as “unproductive and provocative” moves.

Asked whether there would be a diplomatic initiative to de-escalate tensions between Greece and Turkey, he said that the US would remain diplomatically “engaged.”

Developments in the East Mediterranean and the Turkey-Libya deal were the focus of discussions in Athens Monday between Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias and his Cypriot counterpart Nikos Christodoulides. “Turkey must understand that this behavior is counterproductive and drives it into isolation,” Dendias said.

The Coming Two Witnesses

Louis A. Palivos

(from p. 1)

Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel, the son of Cainan. Lk. 3:37 By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death,”and was not found, because God had taken him”; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. Heb. 11:5 Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the arshings hich ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.” Jude 14-15.

References regarding the Prophet Enoch

Before the Canon of Holy Scripture, at the time of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Book of Enoch was considered inspired. The Book of Enoch was considered to be admitted into Holy Scripture, instead of the Book of Revelation. Enoch contains details regarding fallen angels, the origin of demons, the corruption of humans and animals that led to hybrids and to Noah’s Flood. According to Enoch, God’s creation was adulterated by the fallen angels, and the adulterated DNA of both humans and animals created hybrids. This helps to explain the ancient mythologies of the Greeks, Egyptians, Babylonians etc. Some Fathers, like Tertulian, considered Enoch as Scripture. A most profound verse is found in Enoch, “he blessed the elect and righteous who will be living in the Day of Tribulation.” Enoch 1:1. Certainly, Enoch is addressed to a future generation that will experience the Great Tribulation at the time of the Antichrist!

At any rate, the fact remains that Enoch was quoted in the canonized text and was considered as Scripture in the Epistle of Barnabas, by Athenagoras, by Clement of Alexandria, by Irenaeus and by Origin.¹

Could a sinister power continue to limit the dissemination of the contents of Enoch? Yet, the New Testament contains numerous references to Enoch’s ideas and passages. The Prophet Enoch was “taken by God.” Enoch has not tasted death. He is being kept for the Great Tribulation Period.

References regarding the Prophet Elijah (Elias)

There are many references and by name that one of the two witnesses will be by Elijah (Elias).

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. Mal. 4:5 Then He answered and told them, “Indeed, Elijah is coming first and restores all things. And how is it written concerning the Son of Man, that He must suffer many things and be treated with contempt?” Mk. 9:12 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Lk. 1:17 When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” So they said, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Math. 16:13-14 he Holy Scripture positively indicates that one of the two witnesses shall be the Prophet Elijah (Elias) who also was taken to heaven.

Why is God sending the Two Witnesses?

As humanity waxes more and more into unrighteousness, so will the False Church. There will be apostasy by this False Church. There will be Shepherds who will be unfaithful and will be listening to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons. I Tim. 4:1

Many Holy Fathers wrote about the falling away of Shepherds/Priests/Pastors. “Shepherds shall be like wolves,” St. Hippolytus; “The clergy shall be the worst and unrighteous,” St. Kosmas Atoles; “Unrighteousness and lawlessness shall abound with vanity and egotism,” St. Neilos; church leaders will be “without virtue and unfaithful,” Father Moses; and “Bishop shall be against Bishop, priests against priests and people against people,” St. Cyril of Jerusalem.

The two witnesses shall preach one last time for humanity to repent. They shall preach for “1260 days” Rev. 11:3. They shall warn believers; they shall identify the Antichrist and False Prophet; they shall be witnessed by the whole world; they shall be in Jerusalem; they shall be killed, probably, outside of the Holy Sepulcher Church; because, it was there that “our Lord was crucified.” Rev. 11:8. Humanity will be in euphoria to see them hanging openly for three and a half days! However, after the three and a half days, the Two Witnesses shall be resurrected. Rev. 11:11-13.

Why, then, doesn’t humanity repent? Probably for the same reasons it did not repent at the time of Jesus Christ; passions, desires, sin, deceiving spirits and “having a form of godliness but denying its power.” II Tim. 3:5. It is very clear that a few shall heed the warnings and repent.

1. Rob Skiba, *Genesis and the Synchronized Biblically Endorsed, extra Biblical Texts*, Kingsgate Media, LLC., 2013

ΛΥΣΤΕ ΤΟ ΠΡΟΒΛΗΜΑ ΤΩΝ "ΠΑΡΑΣΙΤΩΝ" ΣΤΑ ΡΑΔΙΟΦΩΝΙΚΑ ΜΑΣ ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΑ. ΑΚΟΥΣΤΕ ΜΑΣ ΑΠΟ ΤΟ ΚΟΜΠΙΟΥΤΕΡ ΣΑΣ ΠΕΝΤΑΚΑΘΑΡΑ ΚΑΙ ΜΑΛΙΣΤΑ 24 ΩΡΕΣ ΤΟ 24ΩΡΟ Η ΑΠΟ ΤΟ 99.1 FM

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Greece aiming to lure thousands of foreign students by 2024



Education Minister Niki Kerameus has expressed hope that about 40,000 to 50,000 foreign students from China and other non-European Union countries will be taking part in English-language courses in archaeology, history and the literature of ancient Greece at the University of Athens by 2024.

Kerameus told the Financial Times in an interview she wants Greek universities to be outward-looking and to attract students using the country’s cultural and historical riches.

“During past years Greek universities have been inward-looking institutions. We want to internationalize them and render them a hub for [tertiary] education in Southeast Europe,” she said.

“We are working with academic institutions, with governments and through personal contacts at universities abroad,” she added.

Greek EU-harmonized inflation picks up to 1.1 percent in December



Greece's annual EU-harmonised inflation rate accelerated in December, statistics service ELSTAT data showed on Monday.

The reading was 1.1 percent from 0.5 percent in November. The data also showed that headline consumer price inflation picked up to 0.8 percent from 0.2 percent in the previous month.

Greece had been in a protracted deflation mode since March 2013 based on its headline index, as wage and pension cuts and a multi-year recession took a heavy toll on household incomes.

Deflation in the country hit its highest level in Nov. 2013 when consumer prices registered a 2.9 percent year-on-year decline. The economy emerged from deflation in June 2016.

Euro zone inflation jumped to 1.3 percent in December from 1.0 percent in November as energy prices rebounded and the cost of food products ros

Reduction of solidarity levy will come first this year

The reduction of the solidarity levy will be the first tax break of 2020 and will ease the burden on medium and high incomes, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said on Monday at an event which formed part of last month’s 30th Greek Economic Summit of the American-Hellenic Chamber of Commerce.



Speaking with the chamber’s head, Nikos Bakatselos, Mitsotakis further said that unless the tax of labor is reduced, "we will undermine the competitiveness of the Greek economy."

He appeared certain that the timetable for the development of the Elliniko plot will be adhered to, with

works starting in the first quarter of the year.

Greece publishes list of 'safe origin' countries for asylum seekers



The Greek government published on Friday a joint ministerial decision that outlines 12 countries that are considered safe to return failed asylum seekers, state-run news agency ANA-MPA reported.

The JMD, signed by Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias and Citizen Protection Minister Mihalīs Chrysohoidīs, lists the countries as Ghana, Senegal, Togo, Gambia, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Albania, Georgia, Ukraine, India and Armenia.

Based on article 87 of the new 2019 law on applying for asylum, a country can be judged safe for an asylum seeker if an examination of his or her application shows that they have not cited "serious reasons why the country is not a safe country of origin for the applicant."

The new law provides for the fast-tracked consideration of asylum applications by individuals from safe countries of origin, allowing shorter processing times.

Greece's conservative government adopted a stricter law on migration, aiming to limit arrivals, increase deportations of failed asylum seekers and establish more restrictive holding centers.

Migrant and refugee arrivals from neighboring Turkey have risen in recent months, with tens of thousands of people crammed into identification centers on islands which have long exceeded their capacity.

Italy fully backs EastMed



On Thursday, Cyprus, Greece and Israel will sign, in Athens, an Inter-governmental Agreement on building the EastMed natural gas pipeline, and Italy's Minister for Economic Development Stefano Patuanelli, whose portfolio includes Energy, has sent a letter of support for the project to his Greek counterpart, Environment and Energy Minister Kostis Hatzidakis.

"I would like to express my warmest wishes for the success of the initiative, which Italy continues to support in the framework of the European Projects of Common Interest," Patuanelli mentions in his letter.

The agreement will be signed by Hatzidakis and his counterparts from Cyprus, Giorgos Lakkotrypis, and Israel, Yuval Steinitz. Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades and the Prime Ministers of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, and Greece, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, will attend the signing ceremony.

Earlier Thursday, the Public Gas Corporation of Greece (DEPA) and oil and gas exploration and production company Energean Oil & Gas will sign a letter of intent for the provision of natural gas from the EastMed pipeline.

According to Greece's Energy ministry, the pipeline, among its other advantages, will ensure the supply of natural gas to areas in Greece that currently do not have access to the national natural gas grid, such as Crete, the Peloponnese and western Greece. This will lead to the substitution of natural gas for oil and help reduce carbon dioxide emissions in these regions.



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NEWS FROM GREECE

Tax inspectors go for the big fish



Independent Authority for Public Revenue chief Giorgos Pitsilis

Greece's tax authorities are embarking on the relentless pursuit of tax dodgers in 2020, with tens of thousands of checks scheduled to take place this year by the country's Independent Authority for Public Revenue. The inspections will focus on on-site checks, which will mainly concern major enterprises and taxpayers with large incomes, according to two decisions by IAPR director Giorgos Pitsilis as published in the Government Gazette.

The first decision provides for Services for Investigations and Safeguarding of Public Revenue (YEDDE) to conduct at least 670 investigations and 17,720 on-site checks, including transfer inspections. The corresponding figures in 2019 were 620 investigations and 16,000 on-site checks.

The YEDDE objective is to seek, identify and combat tax evasion and smuggling. In effect YEDDE is the rapid-response force of the tax authorities, as, beyond the typical cross-checking of the accuracy of tax declarations, its role extends to identifying the individuals and corporations that are suspected of involvement in tax dodging. YEDDE agents conduct surprise checks at the professional premises not only of the taxpayers under investigation but also of the individuals or entities that have had transactions with them (or even at their homes provided there is a prosecutor's order).

The second decision provides for the Large Enterprises Inspection Center, the Large Wealth Taxpayers Inspection Center and A Class Tax Offices to implement a total of 25,100 full or partial tax inspections this year. The planning is for at least 70 percent of checks to concern cases from the last five years, and three-quarters of that share to constitute inspections regarding the last three years.

As of this April the IAPR will have an extra tool to monitor taxpayers, with the obligatory activation of online books for all enterprises and freelance professionals. At the same time, electronic pricing will begin, so that this gradually becomes obligatory too, giving tax authorities full access to companies' price lists.

ATHEX: Stock losses contained by end of trade



The geopolitical situation in the Middle East took a toll on global markets on Friday, and the Greek bourse was

no exception. The main index at Athinon Avenue contained its losses at the end of the session, coming off a decline of more than 2.2 percent over the course of the day.

The Athens Exchange (ATHEX) general index ended at 920.09 points, shedding 1.14 percent from Thursday's 930.71 points. On a weekly basis it posted a marginal drop of 0.05 percent.

The large-cap FTSE 25 index contracted 1.01 percent to 2,298.65 points and the banks index slumped 2.10 percent.

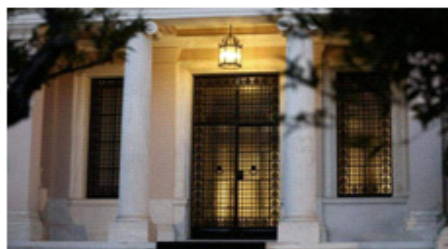
Fourlis Holdings conceded 3.39 percent, National Bank fell 3.28 percent, Aegean Air eased 2.83 percent and Viohalco dropped 2.67 percent. The only blue chips to post an increase were Lamda Development (up 2.25 percent), Coca-Cola HBC (0.53 percent) and Titan Cement (0.10 percent).

In total 19 stocks reported gains, 78 suffered losses and 25 remained unchanged.

Turnover was the highest of the last five sessions, amounting to 52.3 million euros, up from Thursday's 41.7 million.

In Nicosia the general index of the Cyprus Stock Exchange grew 0.37 percent to close at 65.67 points.

PM seeks consensus on foreign policy, his office says



Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis seeks consensus on major issues, especially those that concern foreign policy, his office said Friday after the completion of a series of meetings with the leaders of opposition parties during which he briefed them on the results of his visit to the United States, where mounting tension with Turkey topped the agenda.

Mitsotakis met with leftist SYRIZA's Alexis Tsipras, center-left Movement for Change's Fofi Gennimata, far-right Greek Solution's Kyriakos Velopoulos and the secretary of MeRA25 Yanis Varoufakis.

He also presented the multilateral diplomatic initiatives undertaken by the government over Athens' problems with Ankara.

Apart from a briefing on the US trip, he also presented party leaders the draft of the new electoral law, saying that the element of proportionality and the simultaneous need to ensure governance and political stability are important.

Coming out of the meeting at the Maximos Mansion in Athens, Tsipras said he "was more concerned about developments than about the climate of the meeting" between Mitsotakis and Trump, which some saw as being overshadowed by reporters' questions regarding developments in Iran and Iraq and on the American domestic political front.

Gennimata appeared to accuse the prime minister of failing to call a meeting of political leaders before his four-day visit to the United States so that he could present a "national policy line" with regards to the spike in tension

with Turkey in the wake of Ankara's maritime border deal with Tripoli.

His last briefing will take place on Monday morning, with Dimitris Koutsoumbas of the Greek Communist Party (KKE).

New law would allow majority gov't with 37.5 percent



During his separate meetings with opposition party leaders on Friday to brief them on his trip to the US and his administration's stance on key national issues, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis also gave each a copy of the government's full plan for an overhaul of the electoral system.

The new system essentially abolishes the simple proportional representation system, in line with Mitsotakis's pre-election pledge, and foresees a sliding scale bonus of up to 50 seats for the party that wins the most votes in national elections.

The winning party would be able to form a government on its own with between 37.5 percent and 38 percent of the vote though the exact percentage would depend on the number of parties entering Parliament.

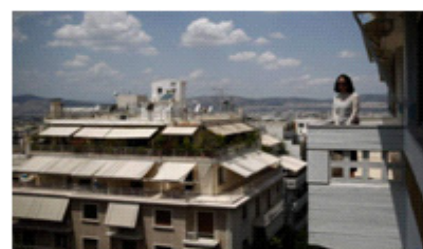
The innovative aspect of the proposed system is that the sliding scale bonus would start from 25 percent of the vote, which would foresee 20 seats, with an additional seat for every additional half a percentage point.

The next time elections are held – most likely in 2023 when the current administration's term is set to expire – they are unlikely to lead to the formation of a government under the simple proportional representation that the previous leftist premier Alexis Tsipras introduced.

However, the aim of the bill, according to government sources, is to ensure that in subsequent polls a party with a strong win can independently form a government and "secure the governability of the country."

The draft bill was put up for public consultation yesterday and on Monday will be submitted to a parliamentary committee for debate before going to a vote in the House's plenary on January 22.

Golden Visa program attracts investments of 2 billion euros



Greece's Golden Visa program has fetched some 2 billion euros into the country's property market since the launch in 2014 of the scheme for the concession of five-year residence permits to non-European Union in-

vestors who spend at least 250,000 on local realty.

According to the latest official data from the Citizens' Protection Ministry, by the end of 2019, a total of 6,304 residence permits had been issued in those five-and-a-half years. Although the threshold is at a quarter of a million euros, lawyers and estate agents confirm that the vast majority of buyers spend an average of 300,000-350,000 euros each.

Last year saw a 22 percent increase in new permits issued, which numbered 2,239, against 1,833 in 2018. Chinese buyers confirmed their dominance in 2019 as their share grew further than in previous years: Since mid-2014, when the program started, 70 percent of permits, or 4,371, have been issued to Chinese nationals. A year ago that rate had stood at around 60 percent, and sector experts believe this figure will grow again this year as an estimated 75-80 percent of transactions related to Golden Visas are conducted by Chinese investors.

Real estate professionals say the number of permits would have been even higher last year had it not been for the significant delays seen in a series of agencies in Attica, at least in the first half of 2019, regarding the processing of applications. The problems were contained somewhat, but did not disappear in the fall, before the situation reverted to normal in the last couple of months.

With the country on a growth trajectory now, it is clear that 2020 will be another year of expansion for the program, as expectations of a future rise in prices have attracted more investors. Market experts say these new investors bear different characteristics to the first generation of Golden Visa buyers, who targeted cheaper properties; the new buyers are eyeing investments with a growth character, as there are buildings that are being reconstructed to be sold to candidate buyers wishing to get a residence permit. That trend was seen in previous years too, but only for low-standard properties; now there are several new investments in more expensive areas such as the southern suburbs of Attica and the Cycladic islands.

Ferry firms arguing over popular routes

While residents of Samothraki and Kythira as well as several other islands in the Aegean Sea fear another problem may deprive them of maritime transportation this year – following similar experiences in recent years – coastal shipping companies are striving to offer more vessels on the popular routes to the Cyclades and Crete.

Ferry operators are now at odds over the day-trip service from Iraklio to Santorini and Mykonos, which is served by high-speed vessels carrying thousands of tourists for one-day visits. According to sources, some operators with a presence on these routes are pressing for the approval of new vessels on the Crete-Cyclades service, after the deadline too, rival ferry firms say. With Santorini suffering from overcrowding at peak season, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development proposing the introduction of tickets to visit the the state.

Tom Ellis

Only Trump can influence Erdogan



Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s ultimate strategic objective is a revision of international treaties which, in his opinion, unfairly keep Turkey in shackles. Turkey’s strongman has referred to the “Blue Homeland” and the “borders of the heart” which, evidently, no longer coincide with the country’s modern-day boundaries.

Erdogan won’t listen to anyone. He will occasionally insult state leaders – including major ones, like he recently did with French President Emmanuel Macron. The only foreign leader he will listen to is Donald Trump. This is not because the two have that many things in common or because of the American president’s special interest in Turkey. Rather, it’s because his actions are governed by the rule of force. And this point does not just concern the military dimension.

Erdogan is convinced that the US president can, in fact, destroy Turkey’s economy as he has threatened to do in the past. It became clear to him a year ago with the case of US pastor Andrew Brunson; and he acted accordingly. Brunson was released.

During his meeting with Trump at the Oval Office, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said what he had to say; he even interrupted Trump to highlight Greek objections and concerns. The inevitable question is, did Trump really pay heed to what Mitsotakis said? And if he did, what does he plan to do?

Greece is a strategic US ally (bilateral defense cooperation is getting stronger by the day). At the same time, it has built the appropriate alliances, working with the two countries that make the pillars of US policy in the Eastern Mediterranean, namely (and primarily) Israel and Egypt, which carries a particular symbolism and influence in the Arab world.

The US follows developments in Greece’s wider region and expresses its concern and its willingness to assist in lowering the tension. It is the only power that can influence the Greek-Turkish equation and drive results, provided of course that its intervention is in the right direction. But in order to be effectual, any engagement must come from the president.

It’s far from certain that even US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo or Vice President Mike Pence can exert meaningful influence over Erdogan. Only Trump, the head of the most powerful military machine and leader of the world’s biggest economy that no one can afford to ignore, can do it. That is, if he chooses to step in himself.

Cyprus repays crisis-era IMF loan ahead of schedule



Cyprus has paid off ahead of schedule an International Monetary Fund loan that was part of a multi-billion euro financial rescue deal in 2013, the finance minister said Tuesday. Minister Constantinios Petrides said the loan's early repayment would bolster the country's credibility in the eyes of investors and improve its ability to raise money directly from international markets. Cyprus managed to repay the loan thanks to a pair of low-interest bond issues. It secured 1 billion euros from a 10-year bond issued at a 0.73 percent rate. A 20-year issue raised 750 million euros at 1.33 percent. The bonds were seven times oversubscribed, a record for the country, Petrides said. "This demonstrates the depth of trust that international markets show toward Cyprus' economy," Petrides said in a statement. The minister said the bond issues cover most of Cyprus' financing needs for the year and save the country 15 million euros in interest payments on the IMF loan. [AP]

Greece bids farewell to Mikroutsikos



Thanos Mikroutsikos’ funeral took place at Athens’ First Cemetery Monday, in a civilian ceremony, as he had wanted. The composer’s body was to be cremated at the new crematorium in Ritsona, north of Athens.

The noted musician and former culture minister died on Saturday at the age of 72 after a long bout with cancer.

The civil funeral of prominent composer and former culture minister Thanos Mikroutsikos was held Monday at the First Cemetery of Athens.

He died of cardiac arrest at the capital’s Metropolitan Hospital on Saturday after a long bout with cancer. He was 72.

The funeral was attended by relatives, friends, artists and politicians, including Greek President Prokopis Pavlopoulos, SYRIZA leader Alexis Tsipras and the general secretary of the Communist Party (KKE), Dimitris Koutsoumbas.

His body was to be cremated at the new crematorium in Ritsona, eastern Attica.

The funeral costs were covered by the state after a decision by the Finance and Interior ministries.

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EU fund absorption qua-
druples in late 2019



Payments from the European Union’s Partnership Agreement for the Development Framework, known in Greek as ESPA, amounted to 32.7 percent of public spending over 2019, a statement by the Development Ministry noted on Friday. When the Agricultural Development Program is included, the payments represent a 35.8 percent share.

In the August-December 2019 period the share of ESPA expenditure increased by 8 percent, which was four times the rise recorded in the first seven months of the year.

“After the July 7 election we received a very difficult situations at ESPA,” Development Minister Adonis Georgiadis said. “Despite the previous administration’s fake triumph talk, Greece was among the last few countries in terms of absorption of resources, with programs that have committed too much in funds that we cannot manage easily running a serious risk of losing money, according to a letter by the competent EU commissioner,” the minister added.

“From the day we took over and up to the end of the year, we almost achieved four times the absorption rate of the period from January 1 to July 7, 2019,” Georgiadis said, pledging to continue this effort: “We do not have the right to miss out on a single euro.”

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Bank of England chief Mark Carney issues climate change warning



Mark Carney: "I would say we're in a climate crisis... action needs to be taken"

The world will face irreversible heating unless firms shift their priorities soon, the outgoing head of the Bank of England has told the BBC. Mark Carney said the financial sector had begun to curb investment in fossil fuels – but far too slowly. He said leading pension fund analysis "is that if you add up the policies of all of companies out there, they are consistent with warming of 3.7-3.8C".

Mr Carney made the comments in a pre-recorded BBC Radio 4 Today interview. The interview, by presenter Mishal Husain, is one of several items on the programme which are focusing on climate change, on the day the show is guest edited by environmental campaigner Greta Thunberg. Mr Carney added that the rise of almost 4C was "far above the 1.5 degrees that the people say they want and governments are demanding".

Scientists say the risks associated with an increase of 4C include a nine metre rise in sea levels - affecting up to 760 million people – searing heatwaves and droughts, and serious food supply problems. Mr Carney, who will next year start his new role as United Nations special envoy for climate action and finance, continued: "The concern is whether we will spend another decade doing worthy things but not enough... and we will blow through the 1.5C mark very quickly. As a consequence, the climate will stabilise at the much higher level." Speaking to the Today programme, he re-iterated his warning that unless firms woke up to what he called the climate crisis, many of their assets would become worthless.

"If we were to burn all those oil and gas [reserves], there's no way we would meet carbon budget," he said. "Up to 80% of coal assets will be stranded, [and] up to half of developed oil reserves. "A question for every company, every financial institution, every asset manager, pension fund or insurer: what's your plan?" "Four to five years ago, only leading institutions had begun to think about these issues and could report on them. "Now \$120tn worth of balance sheets of banks and asset managers are wanting this disclosure [of investments in fossil fuels]. But it's not moving fast enough."

Climate campaigners Extinction Rebellion question whether the capitalist system can halt climate change. Mr Carney said capitalism had a vital role in raising funding for clean technologies. But he added that it had to be tempered by government-imposed incentives, rules and prohibitions of the most damaging activities. Climate change was what he called a "tragedy of the horizon", because the decision-making time horizon of investment managers is between two and 10 years. "In those horizons there will be more extreme weather events, but by the time that the extreme events become so prevalent and so obvious it's too late to do anything about it," he said.

"We look to political leaders to start addressing future problems today."

He told those questioning the consensus on climate change: "We can't afford on this one to have selective information, spin, misdirection... It needs to be absolutely clear because we are all in on it. "To deliver, there needs to be shared understanding about what's necessary. [But] it is reasonable for there to be debates at the margin about where does the role of the state stop - and what's the role of markets."

Mr Carney applauded the UK government for hosting next year's vital global climate conference in Glasgow. He said success was "vital". Under Mr Carney's leadership the Bank of England recently launched a "stress test" to determine which firms and sectors would be worst-hit by climate change. The question is how fast financial institutions can change course.

Recently, investment bank Goldman Sachs ruled out future finance for oil drilling or exploration in the Arctic. The bank said it would not invest in new thermal coal mines (for power stations) anywhere in the world. It also announced plans to help its clients manage climate impacts by selling weather-related catastrophe bonds. Insurance giant AXA said it would stop insuring any new coal construction projects, and totally phase out existing insurance and investments in coal in the EU, by 2030. Environmentalists applaud the moves but say they don't go remotely far enough. Scientists say nations must cut emissions five-fold to avoid a temperature rise over 1.5C.

'Dire consequences' Meanwhile, the heads of two key environmental bodies have warned that 2020 is the "last chance" to bring the world together to tackle climate change to protect communities and nature. In an article on the Green Alliance website, Natural England chairman Tony Juniper and the Environment Agency's Emma Howard Boyd pointed to the recent flooding which saw hundreds evacuated at Fishlake, Doncaster, with some people still out of their homes.

And a report in October on the state of nature in the UK found two-fifths (41%) of the country's wildlife species had declined over the past 50 years and 13% of the species tracked were threatened with extinction in England.

Qasem Soleimani: Iran vows 'severe revenge' for top general's death



Media captionThousands took to the streets of Kerman to mourn Gen Soleimani, a popular figure in Iran

Iran's supreme leader has vowed "severe revenge" on those responsible for the death of top military commander Qasem Soleimani. Soleimani was killed by an air strike at Baghdad airport early on Friday ordered by US President Donald Trump.

The 62-year-old Soleimani spearheaded Iran's Middle East operations as head of the elite Quds Force. Mr Trump said the US took its action to stop, not start, a war. But the killing marks a major escalation in tensions. US officials have said 3,000 additional troops will be sent to the Middle East as a precaution.

Soleimani was widely seen as the second most powerful figure in Iran, behind Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The Quds Force, an elite unit of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), reported directly to the ayatollah and Soleimani was hailed as a heroic national figure.

Under his 21-year leadership of the Quds Force, Iran bolstered Hezbollah and other pro-Iranian militant groups in Lebanon; expanded its military presence in Iraq and Syria; and orchestrated Syria's offensive against rebel groups in that country's long civil war.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the US wanted to de-escalate the situation, but that the strike was "lawful" and "saved lives". Later Mr Pompeo thanked Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for Saudi Arabia's "steadfast support" and "for recognising aggressive threats posed by Iran's Quds force", the state department said.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of Iranians have been holding rallies in Tehran and other cities, denouncing what they call US crimes. Global oil prices rose sharply in the wake of the attack. Ayatollah Khamenei said "severe revenge awaits the criminals" behind the attack. Soleimani's death would double "resistance" against the US and Israel, he added. He also announced three days of national mourning. The ayatollah would lead prayers at a funeral ceremony for the general in Tehran on Sunday, Iranian media quoted Soleimani's family as saying. Later, the Supreme National Security Council, Iran's top security body, said the US would be held responsible for its "criminal adventurism". "This was the biggest US strategic blunder in the West Asia region, and America will not easily escape its consequences," it said in a statement.

Foreign Minister Javad Zarif called the attack an "act of international terrorism" Soleimani's deputy, Gen Esmail Qaani, has been appointed as his successor.

Another Middle Eastern milestone? The Americans and their allies in Israel and the West have tracked Soleimani closely for years. It's likely that he has been in their sights before.

The fact that this time the Americans pulled the trigger suggests that President Trump believes the reward is worth the risk, that the Iranian regime has been so weakened by isolation, economic sanctions and recent demonstrations that it will rage but not offer a serious strategic threat.

But it is not at all clear whether the assassination fits into a coherent US strategy, and such an assumption could be dangerous and wrong.

Soleimani was a colossal figure inside Iran. He was its strategic mastermind. Perhaps he left a plan of steps to take if he were killed.

This assassination at the start of a new year and a new decade might turn into another Middle Eastern milestone, touching off another sequence of bloody events. To begin with, the Iranian regime must now be planning its answer to his death, to show that the position Soleimani spent so long creating outside its borders in the Middle East can be defended. [Read more from Jeremy.](#)

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the US had the "right" to defend itself and praised President Trump for acting "swiftly, forcefully and decisively" A spokesman for UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said the world "cannot afford" another Gulf war

Speaking on Friday afternoon, President Trump said Soleimani was "plotting imminent and sinister attacks" on US diplomats and military personnel in Iraq and elsewhere in the region. We took action last night to stop a war, we did not take action to start a war," he said. Earlier, the Pentagon said the US strike "was aimed at deterring future Iranian attack plans".

Soleimani and officials from Iran-backed militias were leaving Baghdad airport in two cars when they were hit by several missiles from a US drone strike near a cargo area.

The commander had reportedly flown in from Lebanon or Syria.

Iran's Revolutionary Guard said 10 people were killed, including five of its members and Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.