



IN BRIEF

STRIKE

Private sector action to affect public transport, some banks

The public transport system, some banks and public utilities are expected to shut down tomorrow due to a 24-hour private sector strike called by the General Confederation of Greek Labor (GSEE), Greece's largest umbrella union. Travelers at Greek airports are expected to encounter delays, while all ferries will remain in port from 1 a.m. to midnight. GSEE is seeking wage increases and a shorter working week. A demonstration is planned for the center of Athens. The strike will coincide with the arrival of the Olympic Flame at the Panathenaic Stadium in the city center.

TANGLED INTERESTS

Justice minister to enforce ban on TV ownership and public contracts

Justice Minister Anastassios Pappaligouras said yesterday that he would move to stop the current situation where owners of television stations are also involved in business dealings with the State, something that gives them greater influence over the winning of contracts. "Television channel owners cannot be contractors for the public sector as well," Pappaligouras said. This was seen as the conservative government's decision to clamp down on corruption. Meanwhile, Pappaligouras said in an interview with the Apogevmatini newspaper on Sunday that Greece will ratify the EU-wide arrest warrant before the Olympics. (Editorial Page 2)

ARMS PROBES

Missile purchase scrutinized

Athens chief prosecutor Dimitris Papangelopoulos yesterday ordered a wide-ranging preliminary investigation into whether any crimes were committed in the purchase by Greece of Russian TOR-M1 anti-aircraft missiles or in the merger of the Pyral-EBO arms and weapons companies. Three prosecutors were ordered to look into press allegations of improprieties in these two cases.

■ **Sex gang.** Police in northern Greece have arrested at least 12 people suspected of participating in a large sex-trafficking gang that covered much of Macedonia and Thrace. The arrests followed the abduction last Saturday, by five men in two cars, of a young woman outside a cafeteria in the Thracian town of Komotini. The woman was later located in Thessaloniki, where the gang had intended to force her into working as a prostitute.

■ **Olympic security.** US President George W. Bush has written to Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis on matters of terrorism ahead of the August Olympics, Greek officials said yesterday. The letter noted that both the US and Greece worked to liberate Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Public Order Minister Giorgos Voulgarakis yesterday discussed Olympic security with a visiting delegation of US officials that included presidential adviser on counterterrorism Fran Townsend and the FBI's top counterterrorism official, Gary Ball.

■ **Gas leak.** What the local gas supply company described as a "small leak" occurred near the Evangelismos Hospital in central Athens around 6.30 p.m. yesterday during digging work on the corner of Karneadoi and Marasli streets. Attica Gas Supplying Company SA said the damage was repaired within a few minutes.

■ **Careless.** Only 3 percent of Greek women use contraceptive pills, the Greek Family Planning Society observed yesterday ahead of today's World Contraception Day. Greece has the highest rate of abortions in the European Union.

■ **No GMOs.** Eastern Attica's regional authority yesterday declared the area a genetically modified organism-free zone, calling for a ban on the cultivation and consumption of GMO crops until it can be ensured that these pose no threat to the environment and public health.

■ **Bus accident.** The driver of a bus carrying 62 secondary school children and four teachers that crashed into a lamppost on Sunday — injuring 21 people — was sentenced yesterday to eight months and 20 days in prison for causing the accident. The accident, near the town of Amphilochia in western Greece, happened when one of the bus's tires burst. Driver Costas Margaritopoulos, 27, was also fined 150 euros for speeding. He appealed the sentence and was released.

UN presents revised Cyprus plan

Annan calls it a 'win-win' proposal but Greek Cypriots are skeptical ahead of today's deadline

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan yesterday presented the two communities of Cyprus, Greece and Turkey with the fourth version of his blueprint for Cyprus's reunification. The parties must reply today. If they do not reach a deal, Annan will fill in the blanks and put the final proposal to referendum on the two sides of Cyprus on April 20, in the hope that a united island may join the EU on May 1.

"I would appreciate formed reactions no later than tomorrow morning. We will evaluate those reactions and see whether further adjustments are necessary to finalize the text, in contact with all of you, by Wednesday 31 March," Annan told the four delegations. The questions he said each should ask were: "Is this revised plan better than the one on

the basis of which you agreed to negotiate? Does the package of improvements meet your core concerns? Can it reassure your people and give them the courage to seize the chance of peace? Does it respect the other side's core interests?" He added: "I believe it does. I believe this is a win-win proposal."

The Greek-Cypriot and Greek sides, however, appeared to have strong reservations over the proposals. Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis is in Buergenstock, Switzerland, along with his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in a bid to help reach a solution. At 5.15 p.m. local time he received a telephone call from US President George W. Bush, who called on him to do all he could to help solve the Cyprus problem. British PM Tony Blair sent Karamanlis a letter with the same mes-

sage. "The time limit of 48 hours is very tight," Karamanlis reportedly told Bush. "We are here to help and there is good will," he added.

Greek government sources said that Athens understood the reservations of the Greek-Cypriot leadership with the fourth draft of Annan's plan. Karamanlis met with Cypriot President Tassos Papadopoulos and the leaders of the Greek-Cypriot political parties yesterday morning. "Greece is here and actively involved in supporting the Cypriot government in its search for a solution in keeping with UN resolutions and in line with the acquis communautaire," Karamanlis told Cyprus's National Council. "It is obvious that it is the Cypriot government that is negotiating and the final decision rests

with the Cypriot people."

Karamanlis also met with Annan and European Commissioner Guenter Verheugen and told the latter that Annan's plan was incompatible with EU law with regard to the movement of people, capital and services. Verheugen reportedly said he would look into this.

Presenting the plan, which comprises some 220 pages plus another 9,000 pages of annexes, Annan said: "We have tried to be helpful to each side in a manner compatible with the interests of the other. Inevitably, it has not been possible to accommodate all proposals for amendment. The result, as it must be, is an overall compromise."

Addressing first President Papadopoulos and the Greek-Cypriot delegation, he said: "The primary

concern you have voiced has been to render the plan more functional and therefore more viable. I believe that this revised plan is significantly improved on this score, particularly in relation to the workings of the federal government, the updated transitional arrangements, the changes to the property scheme, the adjustments to ensure the financial soundness of the plan, and, of course, the completed laws and treaties." To the Turkish-Cypriots, Annan said the plan addressed their need to preserve "the security and identity of the Turkish-Cypriot constituent state," and that "protections envisaged in the plan for the Turkish Cypriots will be legally secure, and that Turkey would be able to maintain a moderate military presence even after her accession to the EU."

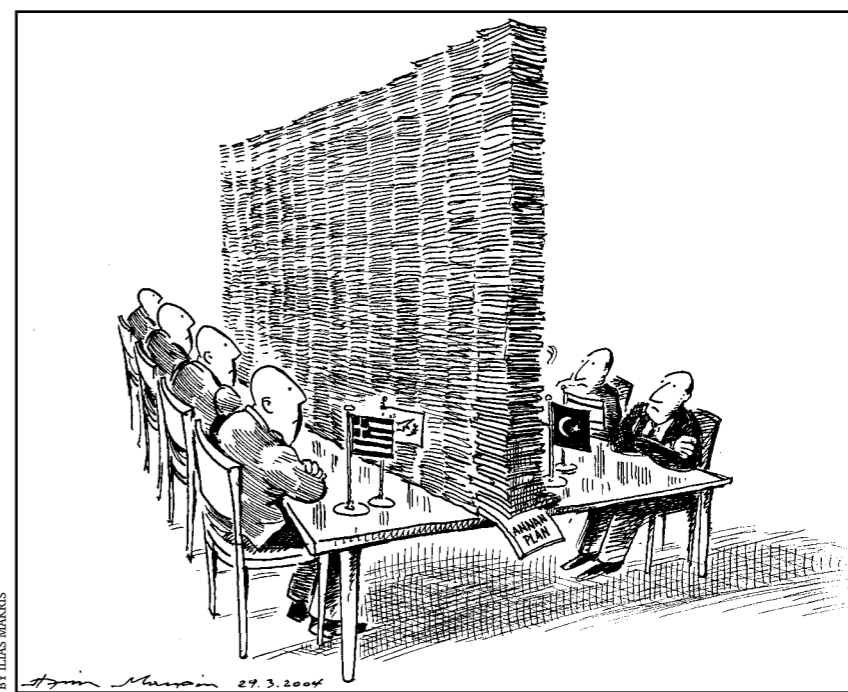
Concerns that draft favors Turkish side

Cyprus's National Council met late last night to discuss UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's proposals. Sources said that the Greek-Cypriot delegation felt Annan's revisions were mostly in favor of the Turkish side.

Among the sticking points for Greek Cypriots are that the Senate (with 24 senators from each group) will preserve the ethnic divide. It will be further reinforced by the reduction to 18 percent of Greek-Cypriot refugees allowed to go back home to the Turkish-occupied north (from 21 percent). A ceiling of 5 percent of the population for Greek and Turkish citizens in the Greek and Turkish sectors, respectively, will be lifted after 19 years. Greek Cypriots wanted this to be permanent to prevent Turkish immigrants from swamping the Turkish-Cypriot side. The number of settlers allowed to

stay in northern Cyprus remains at 45,000. The two presidents will have to write to the European Court of Human Rights to say that compensation for the loss of access to property will now burden the Cypriot federation and not Turkey. Turkish Cypriots will hold on to 29 percent of the island and territory to be returned to Greek Cypriots will be under Turkish-Cypriot administration, with Turkish forces gradually withdrawing over three-and-a-half years. Turkish forces will be cut from 35,000 to 6,000 in 2011, 3,000 in 2018, and 650 Turks and 950 Greeks after Turkey joins the EU.

Derogations from EU law on property will be scrapped when Turkish Cypriots have a per capita income 85 percent that of Greek Cypriots (from the current 30 percent). The nine-member presidency is also not believed to be viable. (Page 2)



Rare IOC praise over velodrome

The International Olympic Committee's top watchdog over Greece's preparations issued rare words of praise yesterday for Sunday's installation of a monumental steel roof over the Olympic cycling track in Athens.

The roof, assembled in two parts and slid together, is a smaller version of the 130-million-euro structure also designed by Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava for the main Olympic stadium, whose timely completion is a major IOC worry.

"The successful sliding of the 4,000-ton velodrome roof is very satisfying for a number of reasons, even though it may have happened later than planned," IOC chief overseer Dennis Oswald said yesterday. "The slide could be seen as a warmup for the main stadium's roof, so it had to go well... We are mindful that other, even greater challenges remain."

Deputy Culture Minister for Sports Giorgos Orfanos yesterday said work to refurbish the 108-year-old Panathenaic Stadium, where the Olympic archery event will be held, is behind schedule. He said the stadium would be ready for tomorrow's arrival of the Olympic Flame.

Central bank seeks 'adjustment'

The governor of the Bank of Greece yesterday called for greater government efforts to put the country's finances in order, singling out unemployment, inflation and the current accounts deficit as the economy's three "major challenges."

In his annual report on fiscal policy, which was delivered to Parliament Speaker Anna Psarouda-Benaki, Nikos Garganas spoke of an "urgent need for greater efforts for fiscal adjustment, given the slacken-

ing of fiscal policy over the past three years."

The central bank governor pointed out that Greece has the third highest joblessness rate in the European Union, while inflation — at 2.5 percent in February — is steadily hovering above the EU average. Meanwhile, the ever-widening current accounts deficit is just under 6 percent of GDP.

Inflationary pressure, according to Garganas's report, is expected to

grow this year due to a greater rate of increase in labor costs, while the August 13-29 Olympic Games are forecast to boost excess demand.

But on the bright side, the strong euro, which is forecast to retain its edge over the US dollar this year, will help counteract inflationary pressure by absorbing the increase in oil prices — which are calculated in dollars. As a result, inflation is not expected to greatly exceed last year's levels.

Growth is projected to remain high, reaching 4.1 percent, partly as a result of an expected increase in tourist revenue due to the Olympics, while shipping revenues are also expected to rise as a result of an anticipated rise in the volume of global trade.

The Garganas report also contained a warning on household borrowing, which rose from 9.3 percent of GDP in 1998 to 26.2 percent of GDP at the end of 2003. (Page 5)



Aid workers sift yesterday through boxes of food for the relief of war-afflicted Iraqis collected a year ago in a public campaign that met with an overwhelming response. But much of the food has still to be sent to Iraq, and remains rotting in Piraeus port authority (OLP) warehouses. OLP has given aid groups until tomorrow to vacate the premises.

COMMENTARY / BY PANTELIS BOUKALAS

Hostage to illusions

In the shadow of the grand illusion — which depicted the Olympic Games as a "national vision" and called on the people to sacrifice any reservations they might have (economic, environmental or ideological) upon their altar — it was natural for a number of smaller illusions to emerge.

One of the illusions was about the manner in which foreigners would welcome the return of the Games to Athens. We had no doubt (some of us still insist) that outsiders — most importantly, political and sports officials — would be moved to see the Games return to their birthplace. More-

over, we were sure that their excitement would prompt them to help us "resurrect" and "purify" a contaminated product and persuade them to treat the "small albeit earnest" homeland with an open mind. Now, we realize that none of this happened. For nothing really could have. The "Games in moderation" will never take place, for no one ever wanted them — neither the IOC, nor the sponsors, nor even the Athens 2004 organizers.

Furthermore, we have been captatulated onto center stage, but not for the reasons we assumed or anticipated. Delays in Olympic-related preparations have al-

lowed foreign news media as well as sports and political officials to criticize, deplore or mock us. The criticism is not always sincere or grounded in truth. Ours was not, back in 1996, when we belittled Atlanta's winning bid to host the Games. The worst thing we could do — as we tend to in similar cases — would be to denounce foreign reservations as being part of an "anti-Greek conspiracy." That would mean taking refuge behind the most paralyzing of our illusions — the one that has it that we are envied by anyone who is not Greek, merely because we are born superior to all in every way.

A long journey to the hospital

Deputy Health Minister Thanassis Yiannopoulos yesterday met with first-aid service employees to discuss upgrading services during the Olympics, as recent research by the European Union's statistics service indicated that most Greeks requiring hospital treatment face journeys of between 20 minutes to an hour, the longest in the EU.

The Eurostat figures, which were published yesterday's Ta Nea daily, show that only 37.5 percent of Greece's population has access to a hospital in under 20 minutes, while the EU average is 51.5 percent. Some 55.1 percent of all Greeks have to travel for between 20 and 59 minutes, while for 6.7 percent, the journey takes over an hour.

According to Dimitris Voulis, secretary-general of the union of National First Aid Center (EKAB) workers, this is mainly due to heavy traffic in Athens and other large cities.

After yesterday's meeting, Yiannopoulos appeared optimistic as to EKAB's performance during the Games.

"The omens regarding EKAB making a good showing during the Olympics are good," he said.

ELA trial resumes as defense lawyers return

The upheaval in the defense of one of the five Revolutionary Popular Struggle (ELA) terrorist suspects came full circle yesterday, as the court accepted that Irini Athanassaki's three original lawyers, who had all walked out in protest, can continue to represent her.

The standoff caused a six-day delay to Greece's second major terrorism trial, which has made little headway since it opened on February 9. Yesterday's decision to let Athanassaki be represented by her original team (the court had rejected a similar demand last week) came after the second of the two lawyers appointed in their stead refused to do the job, saying his client did not want him.

Two members of the initial team stormed out on Feb. 19 after the court accepted as evidence documents purportedly taken from the archives of the former East German secret service. The third briefly resigned yesterday.

