

Prosecutors charge Greek hurdler

Greek hurdler Fani Halkia could face a two-year jail sentence after a Greek prosecutor charged the former Olympic champion with using banned steroids.

Greek sprinters Tassos Gousis and Dimitris Regas were charged with using the same steroid, methyltrienolone.

Halkia's coach, George Panagiotopoulos, was charged with supplying banned substances and, if convicted, faces up to three years in prison and a fine.

The defendants deny any wrongdoing and will go on trial within a year.

Halkia, the 2004 Olympic women's 400m hur-

dles champion, was expelled from the Olympics after testing positive just days before she was due to compete in Beijing.

Her 'B' sample came back positive for methyltrienolone, which the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said is a dangerous drug that "may lead to serious consequences to the health of athletes, even threatening their lives".

In August, the IOC rejected Halkia's defence that she had never used the steroid and that her sample had been subject to "acts of tampering by third parties".

Halkia was a relative unknown before winning gold in Athens, where she set a new Olympic record of 52.77 seconds in the semi-finals.



Halkia was sent home just days before she was to compete in Beijing

Spain's Queen Sofia marks 70th birthday amid gay marriage flap

MADRID (AFP) — Spain's Queen Sofia celebrated her 70th birthday Sunday with a private family gathering as a controversy continued to swirl in the press over a new biography that quotes her as criticizing gay marriage.



15 interviews with Queen Sofia and the Royal Palace approved a draft copy before it was published.

The Royal Palace did not deny that the encounters took place but issued a statement deploring "the inexactitude" of the remarks attributed to the queen,

which it said were made in private.

A Barcelona-based gay rights group demanded Sunday that the book be removed from bookshelves, saying the statement issued by the Royal Palace regarding the "upsetting statements" was "insufficient".

Others questioned the appropriateness of the queen criticizing a law which was passed by parliament.

In 2005, Spain became only the third member of the European Union, after Belgium and the Netherlands, to allow same-sex marriages giving couples the same rights as married heterosexuals.

"Queen Sofia has the right to have an opinion, but not to diffuse it," the director of left-wing newspaper Publico, Ignacio Escolar, wrote in an opinion article published Sunday.

The monarch was scheduled to attend a classical music concert conducted by India's Zubin Mehta later on Sunday with King Juan Carlos.

Spain's king and queen are widely respected as figurehead representatives of the state in part because they have traditionally avoided speaking out on political or social issues.

Mastic magic

A recent visit to the bustling (and spacious) Mastiha Shop in Thessaloniki sure got our taste buds going... For the uninitiated, the MastihaShop brand was formed in 2002 by the Chios Mastiha Growers Association. The core product of course is genuine Chios mastic gum (in Greek, "mastiha").

In 1998, the EU distinguished Chios Mastiha as PDO product (Protected Designation of Origin), an agricultural product described by its region of origin. The PDO distinction also classifies the quality and characteristics of which are mainly due to the geographical environment and cultivation process in the specified area, hence the name Chios Mastiha. Now, there are 11 stores in Greece one in Cyprus, Jeddah, Tokyo, and most recently New York (April 2008)!

The interesting thing is the sheer number and variety of products available. There's now over 300 known applications-- from baked goods, sweets, preserves, ice cream, chocolate (yum!), chewing gum, candy, mints, tea, coffee, liquor, wine, dietary supplements, oral hygiene products, compresses for burns, soap, cosmetics, scented candles and essential oils to name a few.

Dora Stratou Theater in Athens in danger of losing home

The famed Dora Stratou Dance Troupe and Theater are in danger of being evicted from their home in the Philoppapou Hill area of Athens after it was revealed that a total of 6 citizens have made claim to the land where the troupe operates out of.

According to the troupes director, the allegations that the land belongs to someone else came 'out of the blue' and if documents prove ownership, the troupe could legally be kicked out of the area.

The Dora Stratou dance troupe is

well known in Greece and around the world for an institution promoting Greek folk dance, music and costumes. The group was founded in 1953 by Mrs. Dora Stratou, who had an intense passion for Greek folk music and dancing. (She also issued one of the largest series of folk music in the world with 50 records.) The group consists today of 50 dancers, 25 men and 25 women, who are hand chosen to join the dance troupe. There is a group of 15 musicians that play folk music and create one of the best



outdoor living museums that exist - a must if you visit Athens. The dance troupe dances and utilizes a mini theater that was built solely for their purpose and can seat up to 900 people.

Top-selling daily newspaper El Pais said the Greek-born monarch, a cousin of Britain's Prince Philip, was "very upset" over the flap over her statements and "the birthday dinner which her family planned for today will be really sad".

In excerpts of the new biography, "The Queen Up Close", published Thursday in the left-leaning newspaper, Queen Sofia was quoted as opposing the word marriage to describe same-sex unions and criticizing gay pride marches.

"I can understand, accept and respect that there are people of other sexual tendencies, but should they be proud to be gay? Should they ride on a parade float and come out in protests?," she said according to the book, written by conservative Spanish journalist Pilar Urbano.

"If those people want to live together, dress up like bride and groom and marry, they could have a right to do so, or not, depending on the law of their country, but they should not call this matrimony, because it isn't," she added.

The queen is also quoted as saying in the book that she opposes abortion and euthanasia, but said she welcomes the possible election of an African-American, Barack Obama, as president of the United States, describing him as a "sincere, intelligent and effective" leader.

Urbano said the book, which hit bookstores on Sunday, was based on