

New revelation in Mevgal case

The trial of three men alleged to have blackmailed dairy producer Mevgal over price fixing began yesterday with the revelation that one of the suspects communicated with the brother of a government minister regarding the payment of a sum so that a large fine would not be imposed on the company by the competition watchdog.

The court heard that alleged middleman Constantinos Constantinidis, a grain merchant, telephoned the brother of then Employment Minister Savvas Tsitouridis on September 11, 2006, to ask whether Mevgal could pay 200,000 euros in cash, rather than a check for 2.4 million euros, to exempt the firm from

a Competition Commission fine.

The phone call allegedly made by Constantinidis on behalf of Mevgal was not disputed in court yesterday by the firm's president, Petros Papadakis. About a year later, 11 dairy firms and six supermarkets were fined 77 million euros for fixing prices of dairy goods.



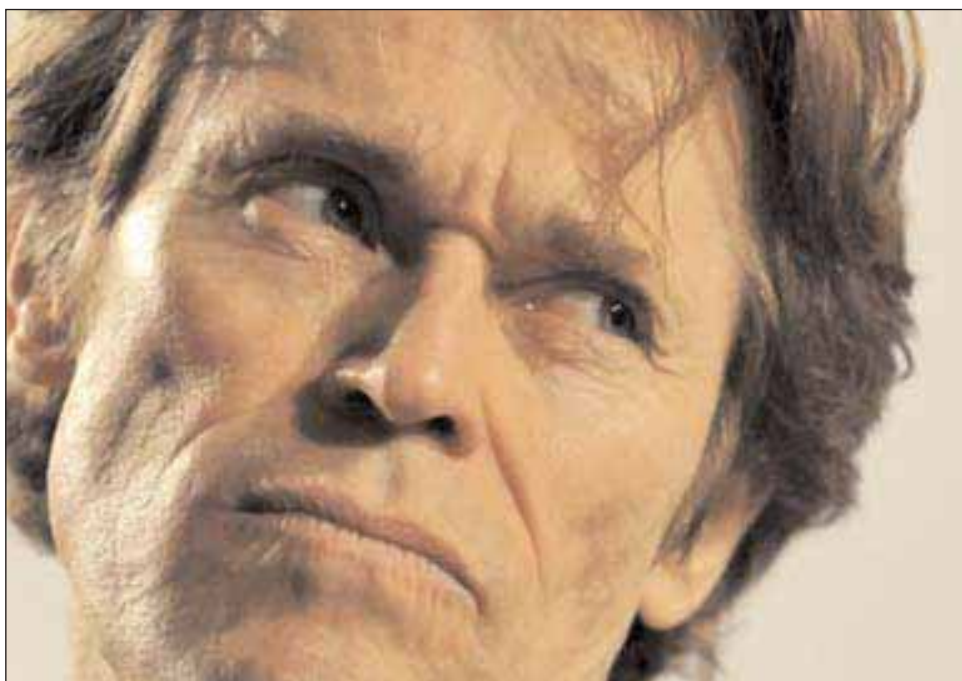
Angelopoulos pulls the punches at Thessaloniki

The Thessaloniki's international film festival, which will celebrate its half-century next year, again reinforced its reputation for being a festival where directors are the stars. For example, when one walks up the stairways of the large Olympia cinema, the walls are plastered with scores of photographs of film directors – not an actor to be seen.

This year, tributes were paid to the Dardenne brothers, Oliver Stone and Terence Davies, who all gave masterclasses to packed, enthusiastic young audiences, and there was a nine-film homage to Ousmane Sembène, who died last year. Takeshi Kitano was also presented with an Honorary Golden Alexander, for lifetime achievement.

Kitano, whose latest film, Achilles and the Tortoise, has Greek connections (the title comes from Zeno's paradox), said that it was a real pleasure to be so honoured especially by Greece, the home of great playwrights and philosophers, and "the cradle of western civilisation". Although these remarks are always flattering to Greeks, they also get on their nerves. It implies that Greece did its bit for civilisation centuries ago and has rested on its laurels ever since.

Despite the cradle being a bit battered these days, having gone through



Willem Dafoe, who stars in Theo Angelopoulos's *The Dust of Time*, at Thessaloniki film festival. Photograph: Nikolas Giakoumidis/AP

wars and revolutions and social and political upheavals, they have still produced many great artists since the days of ancient Greece, including two internationally renowned film directors – Michael Cacoyannis and Theo Angelopoulos, both of whom were represented at the festival.

My Life and Times: Michael Cacoyannis, a documentary by Lydia Carras, reminded us how the 86-year-old was once the embodiment of Greek cinema, reaching his peak of popularity with *Zorba the Greek* (1964). Yet with his Euripides trilogy, featuring the

magnificent Irene Papas, Cacoyannis proved that the classic plays on film could still grip modern audiences.

The big news at Thessaloniki was the world premiere of the 73-year-old Angelopoulos's new film, *The Dust of Time*. The film, a Greek-German-Italian-Russian co-production, mainly in English, and featuring such stalwarts of European art cinema as Bruno Ganz, Michel Piccoli and Irene Jacob, with American Willem Dafoe in one of the main parts, seemed to have all the makings of a Europudding. At least a Europudding made by a master chef. Though not all these fears were allayed, it is difficult not to be impressed by Angelopoulos's complex work. *The Dust of Time*, the second in a projected trilogy (the first was *The Weeping Meadow*, 2004), is as ambitious as most of Angelopoulos's films, which are metaphysical contemplations on the way people are caught up in the sweep of (particularly modern Greek) history. The new film is less stylistically breathtaking than its predecessor yet not as restrictive, nor is the director as

reliant on his masterful use of slow pans and long takes. Instead, he uses some spectacular tracking shots in order to recount the traumas of the second part of the 20th century, ending with a glimmer of hope for the 21st. In fact, the film is a true fin-de-siècle drama, a cry of pain derived from the wounds the previous century inflicted. It is film as metaphor. The characters are caught in a dream of which they (and the audience) are trying to make some sense.

From time to time, the stylised dialogue, spoken by the international cast, sounds stilted to the ear of a native English speaker. In addition, the film, at 125 minutes, is brief by Angelopoulos's standards, which may account for some of the awkward expositions, taking the place of unfiled episodes. Consequently, the film sometimes veers from the profound to the portentous, from the sublimely ridiculous to the ridiculously sublime. However, these weaknesses fade beside the strength of the great set pieces such as the scene when Stalin's death is announced in a town in the Soviet Union, prisoners walking up an endless stairway in Siberia, and the passion of the narrative.

According to the director at the press conference, "*The Dust of Time* is a film that treats the past as if it were in the present. It is history written in capital letters and history written in small print. We used to think of ourselves as the subjects of history. Nowadays I can't say if we are its subjects or objects."

A few days before *The Dust of Time* was shown, the streets of Thessaloniki were filled with students, watched over by teams of riot police, commemorating November 17 1973, the day that the military junta sent in the army to crush a student strike and sit-in which resulted in many deaths. The march was a vivid demonstration of the past in the present illustrated in Angelopoulos's film.

Greek merchant shipping fleet totals 2,071 ships

Greek merchant shipping fleet totaled 2,071 ships with a total tonnage of 38,695,255 grt, the National Statistics Service said.

The statistics service, in a report, said that 628 were cargo ships, 509 tankers and 934 were passenger and other kind of ships.

The Greek merchant marine fleet grew by 5.3 percent in the period from January 2001 to September 2008, while tonnage was up by 41.6 pct over the same period.