

Leros leads action to help illegal migrants

Authorities on Leros are working with aid organizations to make life easier for illegal immigrants arriving on the Dodecanese island, even though the number of undocumented visitors has increased more than threefold this year.

The number of migrants arriving on Leros illegally from neighboring Turkey has increased to 3,500 this year from 975 last year, authorities say. Local authorities have set aside a hotel as temporary accommodation for the migrants. Meanwhile, local citizens and aid organizations provide the migrants with food and medical attention.

"Locals here are sensitized to human pain due to the island's history," Tina Staikou, a local aid worker, told Kathimerini yesterday.

The island's mayor, Timotheos Kottakis, said he and other regional mayors intend to take this service a step forward. "The municipalities of the Dodecanese have decided to donate 5 percent of our income to aid for the migrants' countries of origin," he said.

Back in Athens, in the central district of Aghios Panteleimonas, illegal immigrants are not so welcome. Many spend all day on the streets and in squares before being given shelter for the evening

by longer-established local immigrants or representatives of aid organizations. Some are not so lucky. One heavily pregnant Afghan woman with labor pains was transferred to a local hospital by an aid worker just in time. She has since been given shelter in a tiny apartment with another six Afghans.

The importance of shelter for the migrants is becoming increasingly crucial as winter sets in. A 3-year-old boy died of exposure on Aghios Panteleimonas Square a few days ago. Aid workers fear similar incidents may occur over the next weeks.

Greek Tourism May Weather Crisis Better Than Expected

ATHENS - Greek tourism, a linchpin of Greece's service-oriented economy, may weather the impacts of the financial crisis better than many people expect, Tourism Minister Aris Spiliotopoulos said Tuesday.

The reasons are manifold, said Spiliotopoulos, who cited factors ranging from last week's Indian terrorist attacks to changing travel trends of Europeans and Americans.

"So far with the data that we have, the data show that we shouldn't be complacent, but nor should we talk about catastrophe [in tourism]," Spiliotopoulos said at a conference. "The indicators we have show that we shouldn't be deeply worried."

With its white-washed villages and sunny islands, Greece is one of the world's 20 most popular tourist destinations hosting more than 15 million tourists each year.

The industry, directly or indirectly, accounts for roughly 18% of gross domestic product and an estimated one in five jobs.

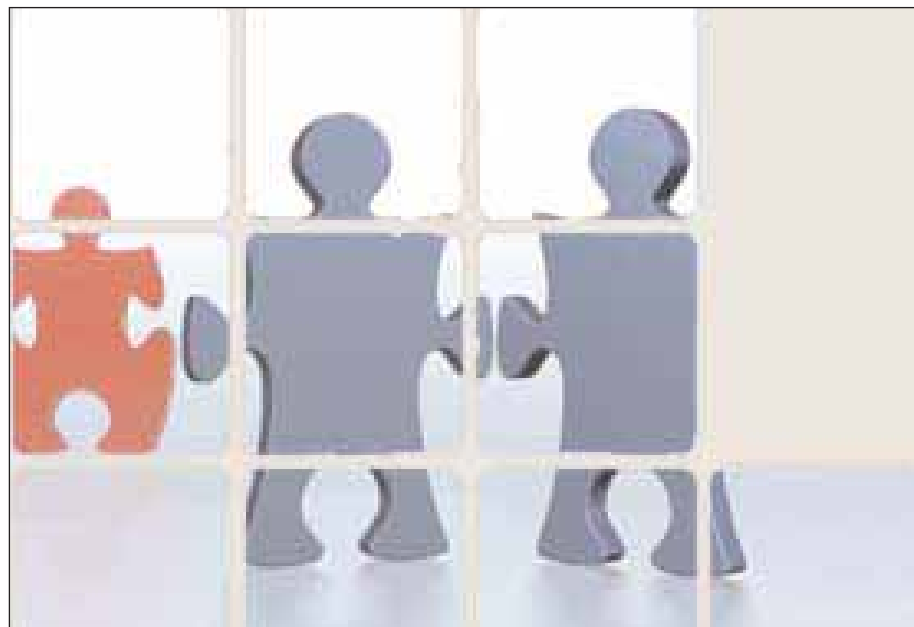
In the years right after the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Greece has been riding a growing trend in tourist arrivals, but which showed some signs of weakening during this year's peak summer season.

Gov't points to milestone reforms in Greek family law

Legislation establishing a legal precedent for cohabitation between heterosexual couples with a view to granting couples living together the same rights as married ones was published in the Government Gazette on Tuesday, identified as state Law No. 3719/08.

The new law also features new provisions for divorce proceedings, parental care for children born out of wedlock as well as returns the right of spouses to add the surname of their spouses to their own (a double-barreled surname).

Justice Minister Sotiris Hatzigakis stressed that the reforms constitute a major breakthrough in Greece's family law sector, solving serious social problems while offering a wider spectrum of options to men and women and guaranteeing the rights of unmarried mothers and thousands of children born out of wedlock.



According to the ministry, the civil union law allows two adult heterosexual individuals to live together after signing a cohabitation pact merely certified by a notary public.

Such a pact is not allowed to be reached in case any of the parties interested is already in a marriage or has signed a cohabitation pact that is still valid. Also, a cohabitation pact cannot be signed by relatives or by an adopted parent and the adopted child. Granting a pal-

imony can be included in the cohabitation pact or in a document signed afterwards. Parental care for a child born while a cohabitation pact was in effect belongs to both parents. The Parental care issues are covered by relative Civil Law clauses concerning children born in a marriage.

As regards divorce procedures, a divorce is granted automatically if spouses are separated for at least two years even if the plaintiff is blamed for the breakup.

The double-barreled last name clause provides that following an agreement between the spouses each of them -- or one of them -- can combine their last names thus forming a two-part surname. The double-barreled last name ceases to be in effect in the case of divorce, whereas in the case of death of one of the spouses it can be changed at the request of the surviving spouse.

Concerning children born out of wedlock, parental care belongs to the mother. If the father recognizes a child born out of marriage can also be granted parental care if there is an agreement with the mother or if she is unable to care for the child.

Jailed dictator makes bid for early release

Former dictator Dimitrios Ioannides has asked for an amendment to the law that would allow some prisoners over 80 years old to be released from jail in the hope that his 33 years in custody at Korydallos Prison will also end. The amendment, which is part of reforms aimed at reducing overcrowding in Greek prisons, will allow any inmates in their 80s who also suffer from cirrhosis of the liver, severe disability or senility to be released. Ioannides, who is 86, does not fall into the latter categories but his lawyer wrote to Justice Minister Sotiris Hatzigakis yesterday and said his client had other serious health problems. A Piraeus court recently turned down a second appeal for release by Ioannides and Hatzigakis has insisted the reforms will not result in his being set free. Ioannides led a coup against dictator Georgios Papadopoulos in November 1973 but was arrested in January 1975.



caption: In 1975 Ioannidis was detained and tried on charges of high treason, rebellion, and of being an accessory to the manslaughters perpetrated during the Athens Polytechnic uprising. On the left, with lawyer Alfantaki during the hearing.