

Kidnappers Release Greek Shipping Magnate, Police Say

ATHENS, Greece— Kidnappers have released an elderly and ill Greek shipping magnate early Tuesday, eight days after they snatched him at gunpoint in a seaside suburb of Athens, police said.

Periklis Panagopoulos, 74, was found in the Aspropyrgos industrial area outside Athens early Tuesday, police said in a statement. They did not say whether a ransom had been paid, or give any further details of Panagopoulos' release.

Three gunmen had snatched Panagopoulos and his driver from near the shipowner's home in the southern Athens suburb of Vouliagmeni on

Jan 12. The kidnappers later released the driver unharmed, but tied to a tree. Two vehicles used in the kidnapping were found burned a few hours later several miles from the site of the abduction.

Police had appealed for Panagopoulos' release, saying he suffered from serious medical problems that meant he required daily medication.

Panagopoulos founded Royal Cruise Line in 1971, with his ships offering cruises around the world. He later sold the company and founded Attica Group, a company that owned two of Greece's largest ferry lines running routes within Greece and from Greece to Italy. He no longer

runs the company.

Kidnappings are rare in Greece, but prominent local businessmen have occasionally been abducted for ransom. Last June, gunmen snatched Greek industrialist Giorgos Mylonas from outside his home in the northern city of Thessaloniki and held him for 13 days until his family paid a ransom.

In August, police arrested four suspects in that case, including Greece's most wanted man, convicted armed robber Vassilis Paleokostas. Paleokostas had escaped from a maximum security prison in Athens in 2006 using a helicopter commandeered by accomplices.

Writer Harry Nicolaides jailed for insulting Thai king

An Australian writer has been sentenced to three years in a Thai jail after pleading guilty to lese-majeste charges for insulting the country's King.

Harry Nicolaides, a 41-year-old Greek-Australian, pleaded guilty to defaming Thailand's revered royal family in his self-published 2005 novel Verisimilitude.

"I plead guilty," Nicolaides told a Thai judge on Monday, after charges of slandering the 81-year-old King Bhumibol Adulyadej and other members of the royal family, including the crown prince, were read out to him in court.

Nicolaides has already spent four months in jail after being arrested at Bangkok airport in August.

"He was found guilty under criminal law article 112 and the court has sentenced him to six years, but due to his confession, which is beneficial to the case, the sentence is reduced to three years," a judge told the court.

Dressed in an orange prison jumpsuit and shackled at the ankles, Nicolaides earlier choked back tears as he described his jail time as like being in Alice in Wonderland.

"This is an Alice in Wonderland experience. I really believe that I am going to wake up and all of you will be gone," Nicolaides told reporters.

"I would like to apologize. This can't be real. It feels like a bad dream.

"I respect the king of Thailand," he added. "I was aware there were obscure laws (about the monarchy) but I didn't think they would apply to me."

During his time in jail he said he had endured "unspeakable suffering", but would not elaborate.

Nicolaides is a frequent visitor to Thailand, where he worked as a university lecturer and resided from 2003-2005.

He has described his novel as a commentary on political and social life of contemporary Thailand. A Thai website described the book as an "uncompromising assault on the patrician values of the monarchy". It has been reported only seven copies of

the book have been sold.

Lese-majeste, or insulting the monarchy, is regarded as a serious offence in Thailand, punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

In 2007 a Swiss man, Oliver Jufer, was sentenced to 10 years in jail for defacing pictures of the king but he was later given a royal pardon and deported from the country.

Family fears for writer Harry Nicolaides in Thai jail

THE Doncaster parents of writer Harry Nicolaides have spoken of their shock after he was jailed last night for offending the Thai monarchy.

They told the Manningham Leader this morning they were "devastated".

Nicolaides's desperate family - elderly parents Despina and Socrates and brother Forde - are considering applying for a royal pardon.

Mrs Nicolaides has previously told the Manningham Leader about the squalid prison conditions her son describes in letters home.

Among the worst stories was how he watched his cell mate die after his calls for medical help were ignored.



The man's body was not removed until the next morning.

Mrs Nicolaides said her son told of the constant stench of sewage from the communal toilet and daily fights between the 95 inmates who were "crammed" into one cell.



Greece: automatic weapons found in abandoned car

THESSALONIKI, Greece: Police in northern Greece say they have found three automatic weapons and 34,000 bullets in an abandoned car.

Police say the weapons include two AK-47 rifles, and the cache was found Monday in a stolen car in the northern city of Thessaloniki. Police believe the arms were abandoned by weapons smugglers, and said they have informed the anti-terrorism division.

In Greece, the smuggling of weapons smuggling is common, often coming from neighboring Albania, where army bases were looted during deadly rioting in 1997.

Paradise job ad phoney revealed

The story of a woman who supposedly tattooed an advertisement for the Great Barrier Reef on her arm to win a dream island job was concocted by Tourism Queensland, it has been revealed. The fake YouTube video is just another example of Australian advertising agencies' "crude" use of social media to promote brands, a marketing expert says. In its latest campaign, Tourism Queensland invited people to send in a 60-second video of themselves to apply for a \$150,000 caretaker job for Hamilton Island, which it dubbed "the best job in the world". Local and international media outlets last week reported thousands of applicants had already sent in videos, including an Australian woman called "Tegan" who supposedly showed herself visiting a tattoo parlour to get a 10-centimetre tattoo proving her love for the Great Barrier Reef. But Tourism Queensland has since admitted "Tegan" was not a genuine applicant, but a member of the ad agency that created the campaign promoting the Great Barrier Reef islands. It said the "fake" video, one of the first posted, was only intended as an example of the creativity Tourism Queensland expected from applicants, and to spur people to post their own videos. But there was nothing on the video or the campaign website to say the video was an example. Marketing expert Tim Burrowes said the video showed



Australian ad agencies were starting to use social media - such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook - to promote their brands. "Social media is a conversation between consumers and they are trying to insert their brand into that conversation," Mr Burrowes said. "You're just seeing the beginnings now of Australian agencies doing it, but they are not terribly sophisticated so far." Mr Burrowes - who was first to expose the fake Tourism Queensland video on his blog, Mumbrella - said Australian agencies' efforts so far at using social media had been "a bit lame and obviously faked up". Many YouTube users sensed the Tourism Queensland tattoo video was a fake, some pointing out that the applicant's skin was not red, as it should be, after getting a tattoo. Mr Burrowes also took aim at the weekend's story about a 24-year-old woman, Heidi Clarke, who has posted a video on YouTube reportedly to track down a mystery man whose jacket she found at a Sydney cafe.