

# Latter-day Onassis could rescue debt-laden Olympic Airlines

After years of abortive attempts to sell off Olympic Airways – once the pride and joy of Aristotle Onassis – the Athens government hopes another Greek magnate will come to the rescue of the debt-ridden airline. Less than a week after the collapse of an international attempt to privatise the loss-making airline, the ruling conservatives are praying that flamboyant former lawyer Andreas Vgenopoulos will pick up where Onassis left off.

Negotiations between the businessman and the government begin tomorrow and could end tortuous

attempts to sell off Europe's last wholly state-owned airline. The company, renamed Olympic Airlines in 2006, has an accumulated debt of more than €2.7bn (£2.4bn). The long-awaited privatisation is a cornerstone of the government's economic reform programme. "It is a white knight bid," said one national economic official, "and if it comes to fruition we'll all be heaving a sigh of relief."

Like Onassis, Vgenopoulos first made a fortune in shipping and is blessed with the Midas touch. Profits from his Marfin Investment Group (MIG), Greece's

biggest buyout fund, have soared under his stewardship. The holding company's major shareholder is Dubai Financial Group. And just like Onassis, the 54-year-old entrepreneur also sees it as his patriotic duty to bolster the image of Greece.

Announcing its interest in acquiring Olympic, MIG said last week it was crucial that the company remained in Greek hands. Vgenopoulos emphasised that he was willing to offer the government the ability to re-nationalise the airline within three months of the next elections.



## Chinese make Greece top destination

Neither recession or riots are scaring the Chinese from Greece, which have marked the country as their favorite tourist destination. Mass media in China has said an increase of awareness in Greek culture, as well as great infrastructure and a safe climate have lured many Chinese to wanting to visit the country.

To help boost tourism numbers also this year, we hope at least, is the increase of flights from Etihad Airways from the city of Abu Dhabi in the UAE. A weekly flight will commence soon to Athens, which will increase to a frequency of five times a week by the summer. Etihad Airways will also launch a three times a week flight to Athens from Melbourne, Australia.

## Young man's mutilated body found in Koropi

The horribly mutilated body of a 20-year-old man from the town of Koropi in Attica was discovered at around midday on Sunday, near the town's former dump. According to police, the young man had been missing since Thursday night and they are treating the case as a brutal murder. The victim's hands and feet were tied with his own shoelaces when he was discovered, while police say that he was most likely murdered at some other location and transported to where he was found by the perpetrators. According to an announcement, the young man was last seen by his family at 10:30 on Thursday night, when he told his mother that he was going out to meet a friend and give him a mobile phone. An hour later, he phoned his mother again and said that he would be coming home soon.

When he failed to return some time later, his mother tried to call him on his mobile again and an unknown man answered the call and said that her son was being held, demanding 35,000 euros as ransom in order to set him free. The demand was repeated to the young man's father, while they threatened to kill the 20-year-old if the family contacted the police.

# The Bill for Expatriate Greeks' Vote Approved

*The government committee, which met on Tuesday and presided by Costas Karamanlis approved the draft bill on the expatriate Greeks' vote. Interior Minister Prokopis Pavlopoulos did not rule out any changes to be introduced in the representation of regional administrative divisions and epistolary voting. He also called on the main opposition party to consent and do not deprive expatriate Greeks from their right to vote in Greece.*

As he stressed, their vote will be counted in the county and the parties will be allowed to have up to three candidates on the county electoral ticket. Development Minister Kostis Hatzidakis informed the committee on the developments on Olympic Airlines, as well as on MIG's proposal, while earlier the prime minister had held a meeting with Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis.

After the meeting, the Interior minister reminded that during the revision of the Constitution in 2001 a provision passed on the expatriate Greeks' participation in the Greek elections, stressing that when PASOK (Socialists) ruled it did not introduce a relevant executive bill.

Mr Pavlopoulos stressed that it is known that the prime minister and the government had committed themselves from the beginning to vote for the executive bill. Since 2006, he added the first draft was discussed with the rest of the parties, since a 2/3 majority is required for the bill to pass.

As he stated after the discussion that was held on the Interior Ministry's initiative, "we concluded with the parties on certain axes, which we depicted on a draft bill, which is now being tabled at Parliament."

Those who are entitled to vote are expatriate Greeks who reside permanently abroad, those who serve Greek services abroad, as well as Greek employees of International Organisations. Special electoral lists will be created in consulates and the parties will choose three candidates for the county electoral ticket. These candidates should have been living permanently for at least 10 years abroad.

This means that each party assigns the expatriate Greeks' representatives, whom he includes in the electoral tickets, meeting its own criteria.



In this way, all expatriate Greeks will be represented and problems will not be created in relation to the removal of seats from the regions, so that the regions are represented.

The bill is transitional, since the institution is being implemented for the first time.

"What matters is for to be introduced for the first time and in the future we could see whether and if regions abroad could be represented, as well as discover who epistolary vote could be implemented," stated the Interior minister.

The expatriate Greeks who vote are added to those who vote in the county and in this way their percentage is taken under consideration in the distribution of seats for which party so that no problems are created regarding autonomy, which should exist on the basis of the electoral law each time.

"We believe" added Mr Pavlopoulos "that all political parties will respond to this call", stressing that we cannot deprive expatriate Greeks from their right to participate in the Greek political life. It is our obligation as we know how much we owe them and how much they can help the Greek political life with their ideas.

Referring to the bill, the government spokesman pointed out that the expatriate Greeks' vote constitutes the government's commitment and the Constitution's behest, adding that is neither related to the Euro-elections and nor to the next parliamentary elections.

Mr Evangelos Antonaros reported that a dialogue had already taken place with all parties and the bill, which will be tabled by the majority, had been processed and will be implemented at the elections that will be held after 1 January 2011.

In reply to a question as to whether the political parties have changed their positions in relation to the past, Mr Antonaros spoke of a transitional settlement on which the Parliament should have as say.