

# A long-distance love affair

THEY THINK of themselves as Greek and teach their children to be proud of their heritage, but their love affair with their cultural homeland can best be described as a long-distance relationship.

A majority of Greeks in the United States, Canada, Australia and across Europe say they love Greece but wouldn't ever consider living here, according to the findings of a new global survey.

Commissioned by the foreign ministry and billed as the largest poll of its kind, the survey conducted by Athens-based Kapa Research and Harvard University's Centre for Hellenic Studies found that 78 percent of first- and second-generation Greeks abroad consider themselves to be Greek above all else.

"One of the most important findings of the survey, and something I had not anticipated, is how much these people, regardless of where they reside, say they value their Greek identity," said Antigoni Lyberaki, the Athens University economics professor who headed the study.

"They consider this to be very positive - more of an advantage than an obstacle in their integration. And this is also evident in how they describe their current economic situation and how they see their future. They have a much more positive outlook than Greeks living in Greece.



## 'Strong desire'

"The survey findings reveal a strong desire of Greeks abroad to hold on to their Greek roots in their country of residence," Lyberaki said. "This is something we are proud of. We take it for granted that a Greek residing in the United States or Belgium will still consider himself to be Greek, but we are bothered when an Albanian immigrant roots for the Albanian national team when they compete against Greece."

According to the survey, 77 percent of respondents said they consider Greece to be their homeland and 11 percent said Greece is their second homeland.

Two-thirds said they are "proud" to

be Greek and 67 percent said they try to preserve their Greek heritage and want the same for their children. What's more, the ties to Greece go beyond an emotional connection. Two-thirds of respondents said they own property in Greece.

However, only one-quarter said they have thought about investing their money here, mainly due to Greece's reputation for a grinding bureaucracy. The red tape is the reason cited by 49 percent of respondents who said they would probably never consider investing in Greece.

About 20 percent said they believe investing in their country of residence is safer, while 18 percent said they are

not aware of the investment opportunities Greece has to offer.

The majority of Greeks abroad, according to the survey, are well integrated into their country's society and labour market. A third of them said the secret to their smooth integration was the relative ease with which they were granted citizenship. About 60 percent said employment and educational opportunities paved the way for their successful integration.

Greece, on the other hand, has a poor track record when it comes to issuing citizenship or even permanent residence. The conditions immigrants in Greece must fulfil are tougher than in most other EU nations.

## Overseas vote

With general elections less than a month away, tens of thousands of Greek citizens residing abroad (mainly in Germany, the UK and other European countries) are expected to make their way to Greece to cast ballots.

The government does not know how many eligible Greek voters reside abroad. Based on foreign ministry figures, there are nearly 6 million people of Greek origin currently residing in more than 140 countries. It is unclear who among them holds Greek citizenship and is eligible to vote.

A long-awaited overseas ballot bill sank in parliament earlier this year. Ruling New Democracy did not manage to secure the minimum two-thirds majority in parliament required to pass the bill.

## GROUP MERGER - MARFIN POPULAR BANK TO ABSORB MARFIN EGNATIA BANK

The Boards of Directors of Marfin Popular Bank and Marfin Egnatia Bank convened today and decided the merger of the two banks will result in the absorption of Marfin Egnatia Bank by Marfin Popular Bank and that the bank's legal seat will remain in Cyprus. Marfin Popular Bank's management believes that there exists a need for constructive dialogue for the enhancement of the institutional and regulatory framework of the Cypriot financial services system, as well as the abolition of dysfunctions which act as barriers to entrepreneurship and the attraction of international investments in Cyprus. The Bank is committed to contributing to a strong and vibrant financial industry in Cyprus. The Executive Vice-Chairman of Marfin Popular Bank Mr. Andreas Vgenopoulos made the following statement: "The unfavourable developments for the Cypriot economy commanded the need to protect the best interests of the Country and its Society. Our decision was significantly influenced by the pleas of the people of Cyprus and of the vast majority of the Cypriot business community and political establishment. We ought to thank especially the Parliamentary Committee on Institutions, Merit and the Commissioner for Administration (Ombudsman) as well as all of those who treated our concerns sensibly and encouraged us to stay in Cyprus in order to contribute towards the creation of a better institutional and economic environment."

## Greeks in Guatemala

A special on Greeks in Guatemala by the Athens News Agency portrays a vibrant community of people active in a broad range of activities, ranging from the "Molon Lave" plastics to "Grecia" chocolates, which later spawned an entire chocolate manufacturing business by Panagiotis Papachiou, the first Greek to officially migrate to Guatemala in 1926. But there are also stories of a Greek boat builder by the name of Mavros the first Greek to set up shop in this Central American country in 1900.

The country's largest port, Buerto Barrios, is home to a number of Greek families. Liberis Chronopoulos, for instance, left his hometown of Tripoli, in Peloponnisos, married and ended up staying 35 years to be near his children. Today he is 67 years old. Christos Klikopoulos, from Litochoro in Katerini, set up the "Europa" hotels, a highly successful business now run by his children.

Equally impressive is the story of four Greeks who in 1960 set up a plastics production business after buying used equipment from Colombia. Since 1962, the business has led to a number of companies including Metaloplast, Megaplast,



Elenoplast, Lacoplast, Xeoplast, Neoplast, Spartaplast, Diversiplast and Aristoplast. There is also the story of Giannis Kefalas, a former basketball player and coach to the Guatemalan national team, who today runs one of the top 100 silk screen businesses in the world.

Greek businessmen continue to settle in Guatemala. Ippokrates Eliadis and Nikos Vatsakis are two such younger generation Greeks who are currently running successful businesses in the country. Speaking to ANA, Mr. Vatsakis, who left Skala in Laconia 35 years ago said that Greeks have always been very well received in Guatemala.

Dimitri Molyviatis is a case in point. He was general secretary of the country's Christian Party that was in government in the 80's. Speaking to ANA, Mr. Molyviatis, who runs the 7 Caldos restaurants and holds regular meetings with fellow Greeks at the «Greek Corner», said that there is no official Greek community in Guatemala. He also said that if Greek cultural events were to be held in the country, participation would be 'unprecedented'.

The living has not been easy for the 21 Greek families living in Guatemala, which emerged from a 35-year civil war as recently as 1996.