

Religious icons may have to go

Justice Minister Haris Kastanidis admitted yesterday that Greece will have no choice but to remove religious icons from school classrooms and other public buildings if the European Court of Human Rights stands by a ruling it made earlier this month.

"If the European Court of Human Rights sticks to its original decision that religious symbols should be removed from all public buildings, then I think our country will have to adapt to the new situation arising from this decision," said Kastanidis in response to a question from right-wing Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) MP Asterios Rondoulis.

However, Kastanidis added that any change to the status quo, which sees icons of the Virgin Mary hung in classrooms, courtrooms and public service offices, would take place "only after agreement has been reached with the Church of Greece."

However, it seems that the Church is highly unlikely to concede to the removal of icons or crucifixes from buildings.

The Church of Greece reacted angrily to such suggestions when it emerged earlier this month that the European Court of Human Rights had ruled that the presence of crucifixes in classrooms was a breach of human rights after hearing a case brought by a mother from Italy.

"It is not only minorities that have rights, the majority has them as well," said the head of the Greek Church, Archbishop Ieronymos,



adding that the matter would be discussed by the Holy Synod if necessary.

"Youngsters will soon not have any symbols to inspire and protect them," said Bishop Nikolaos of Fthiotida. Bishop Anthimos of Thessaloniki said he hopes Greek officials will appeal any decision by the court in Strasbourg.

The European court found that the right of parents to educate their children according to their own beliefs, and children's right to freedom of religion, were breached by the presence of a crucifix in classrooms.



Docu-drama on Rebetiko legend Roza Eskenazi filmed

The turbulent yet famously creative and colourful life of Roza Eskenazi, an incomparable performer of Rebetiko and Asia Minor music in a handful of languages and whose career spanned much of the 20th century, is the subject of a docu-drama being shot in Thessaloniki by an Israeli film crew over the recent period.

Entitled "My Sweet Canary", the film stars Israeli actress Yasmin Levy, who is also known for her renditions of songs in Ladino, the heavily Spanish-influenced language of Thessaloniki's landmark Sephardic Jewish community.

The docu-drama is directed by 32-year-old Haifa native Roy Sher, who spoke about the production on Wednesday in Thessaloniki. Sher said he discovered Rebetiko music and the works of Eskenazi, who died in 1980 near Corinth, in a small tavern in Jerusalem in 2004.

Greek state broadcaster ERT is a co-producer of the 90-minute film, which is expected to be released in roughly six months.

French research ship docks at Flisvos

The French scientific research ship "Tara" is in southern coastal Athens' Flisvos marina since Wednesday, where it will remain until Sunday.

The vessel's 15-member crew is made up of oceanographers, biologists, geneticists and other experts from distinguished scientific research centers.

Its three-year mission, "Tara Oceans", to all the seas of the world was launched on Sept. 5, 2009 from the port of

Lorient in Brittany and will be completed in 2012, having covered a total of 150,000 kms (81,000 nautical miles) and visiting roughly 50 countries.

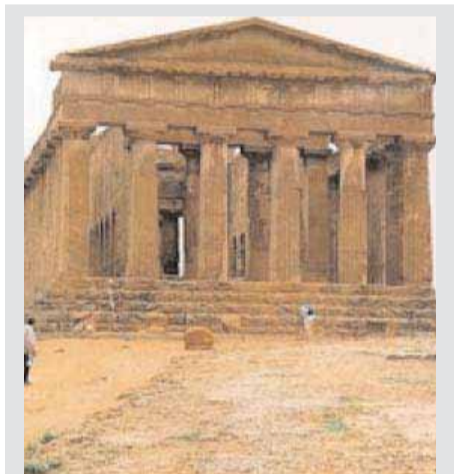
The next scheduled stop of the ship will be Larnaca, Cyprus on Dec. 4 before heading for Lebanon and Egypt en route to the Indian Ocean.

"Tara Oceans" is an international mission organised by Tara Expeditions and an international scientific

consortium under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The mission will attempt to provide answers to climate issues and further knowledge on marine biodiversity by studying microscopic life in the oceans to understand its impact on the climate of the planet.

The goal is to inform the public about the vital role of oceans while boosting environmental awareness particularly among children.



HOUSES OF THE RISING SUN: Research Sheds New Light on Ancient Greeks

New research at the University of Leicester has identified scores of Sicilian temples built to face the rising Sun, shedding light on the practices of the Ancient Greeks.

Dr Alun Salt, an astronomy technician from the Centre for Interdisciplinary Science at the University of Leicester, found that out of all the temples he surveyed in Sicily, all but three faced the rising sun.

The findings have been published on line in the journal PLoS ONE.

The results may imply that there is an 'astronomical fingerprint' for Greek settlers in the Mediterranean which can distinguish between sites settled by people following the Greek religion and natives who adopted Greek style through trade, but kept their own culture. In the ancient world temples were not only associated with religion but were also political and economic statements.

2,500-year-old Greek theatre under the Acropolis to be restored

The ruined theatre under the Acropolis where the works of Euripides and other classical playwrights were first performed some 2,500 years ago will undergo partial restoration over the next six years, Greek officials said. The 6m program is set for completion by 2015 and will include extensive modern additions to the surviving stone seats of the Theatre of Dionysus.

Standing on the southern slopes of the Acropolis hill, the theatre was first used in the late 6th century BC. It saw the opening performances of

tragedies by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, as well as Aristophanes's comedies.

"The Theatre of Dionysus ... is of immense historic significance, as it is here that the masterpieces of ancient drama were first performed," said architect Constantinos Boletis, the project leader.

A small section of the theatre's stone seating – which could hold up to 15,000 spectators – still survives. Restorers will gradually add several tiers, using a combination of new

stone and recovered ancient fragments, while strengthening retaining walls and other parts of the building.

"The programme will have a major impact on the overall aspect of the monument," Boletis told a press conference.

The Dionysus project will be funded by a grant from regional authorities in Athens along with the Diazoma nonprofit foundation for the protection of the estimated 140 ancient theatres and concert halls that survive throughout Greece.