

First Greek woman athlete to swim across Gibraltar Strait



feat to start in Europe and finish in Africa. To do this, it took me a year of preparation," she adds.

"Throughout the effort, thousands of thoughts cross your mind. It is the moment when you need to have a strong personality and determination to achieve your goal. I set out on this adventure armed with determination. The crossing is some 16-18 kilometers, but due to the strong currents and winds, it easily becomes 21-22 kilometers. The finish is not at any specifically designated point, the goal is to touch the African continent," she explains.

"What I will never forget is the cold I felt when I reached the Moroccan coast, as the water temperature was barely 16C. My heart felt ready to stop and I was numb all over. The good thing is that I had prepared well and was in good spirits, thanks to my trainer Nikolas Repanis who encouraged me and gave me useful advice throughout the crossing. Nor will I forget that every half hour I would stop to eat something very light and drink water with lemon and honey to replenish the energy lost during the effort. And all this without touching the accompanying boat, because that would have invalidated my effort," Menexiadi continues.

She also remembers the curiosity-seekers, the crews of merchant ships who would bring their vessels to where the action was taking place to see what was going on. "It is terrifying to see these huge bulks passing so close by you and raising waves, which you then have to pass through."

One year after this difficult feat, the memories vivid as she ponders and plans her next venture.

ANA

A year has passed since Danai Menexiadi became the first Greek woman athlete to swim across the Strait of Gibraltar.

The 34-year-old long distance swimmer from Thessaloniki completed the one-way cross on June 9, 2009, in 4 hours and 48 minutes, setting off from Tarifa Island in Spain and finishing at Leona Point in Morocco.

During the crossing, Menexiadi not only braved adverse weather conditions and strong currents, sharks and large fish, but she did so without wearing a neoprene suit for protection against the low water temperatures, at the spot where the Atlantic Ocean meets the Mediterranean Sea and connects Europe with Africa.

An office employee, Menexiadi trains early every morning, all-year-round, at 6:00 a.m. before going to work, and several times a

week she also trains at night.

The sea, for her, is an outlet from the every-day humdrum. "I can't imagine even a day going by without training or without the sea. I don't stop even in the winter, except for a few occasions when the weather is extremely bad," she said.

On last year's feat, she remembers: "The currents at that point are very strong, and if the swimmer is not careful and does not have a good escort, things can get very bad and he/she may not finish. But the most important thing to remember is that the water temperature is very low, and the spot is a major crossing for large merchant ships."

"From the very first moment, the only thing on my mind was reaching the finish. I believed deep down inside that I would make it to the finish. It is a big



Fred Nile

Ethnic Communities Council condemns Fred Nile Burqa Ban Proposal

The Ethnic Communities Councils of NSW (ECC) has criticised the Christian Democratic Party and its NSW Upper House representative Fred Nile, for proposing legislation to ban the wearing of the burqa and other face veils in public.

These are disgraceful proposals from the Christian Democrats which amount to discrimination of the worst kind. Australia is a free, democratic and culturally diverse society where people have the absolute right to dress as they choose, said Acting ECC Chair, Saeed Khan.

Mr Khan said Mr Nile's bill is a dangerous and divisive attack on one of the many diverse communities that make up the rich cultural and economic vitality of NSW.

"His bid for a populist policy to boost his party's chances at the next elections seems to override any care for community relations in New South Wales.

"In earlier times Fred Nile was campaigning for the banning of topless sunbathing. Does he want us to cover up or to take off? Does he want other face coverings banned like full face bike helmets, bridal veils, swine flu face masks, tattoos on the face? Australians have the personal choice of what they wear and don't wear. If Fed Nile had genuine concerns for safety or security issues, these can be dealt with by practical and sensitive measures without imposing his extremist views on NSW citizens.

"Australia is a secular and multicultural society that has no need for this type of extremist legislation", said Mr Khan.

Polluting plant to shut

In A symbolic gesture that she said will mark the end of an era, Environment, Energy and Climate Change Minister Tina Birbili on June 18 shut down Ptolemaida 1, a 50-year-old, 70MW Public Power Corporation (PPC) lignite-fired plant. "The closure of the PPC's first polluting lignite plant marks the end of an era and the start of a new one, using cleaner lignite and with renewable energy sources acquiring a central role in Greece's energy mix," an environment ministry announcement said. To replace Ptolemaida 1 and other older plants, Birbili is expected to announce construction of a 550-660MW plant at Ptolemaida, expected to cost 1.6bn euros.

Turkey must return orphanage

THE European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has ordered Turkey to return a historic orphanage on the largest of the Princes' islands to the Ecumenical Patriarchate within three months. The disputed building is on the island of Buyukada (Prinkipo in Greek), the largest among the nine islands in the Sea of Marmara. Commenting on the ruling, Turkish Minister for EU Affairs and chief negotiator for Turkey in Europe Egegen Bagis said that the decision had been expected and had simply now appeared in writing. According to Bagis, a formula has been worked out with the Ecumenical Patriarchate for carrying out repairs to the building, which was in a very bad state, and converting it into a centre for environmental studies. "We are in talks with the patriarchate, which views the issue positively," he added.

In past statements, Ecumenical Patriarch Vartholomeos (photo) has said the patriarchate intended to turn the building into an environmental centre if it was restored.

