

## Erdogan critical of state-appointed muftis

Turkish Premier Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday criticized the appointment of senior religious authorities for the Muslim minority in Thrace by the Greek state, a day after meeting with his Greek counterpart, Antonis Samaras, in Qatar, when Erdogan had spoken of the construction of a mosque in Athens.

"The appointment of muftis has increased tension in the region," Erdogan told members of his

Justice and Development Party.

"We asked the Greek government to show greater sensitivity over minority issues. Such a mistake... is unacceptable," he said.

Ankara has in the past backed its own muftis that are not recognized by the Greek state.

An amendment passed earlier this month allows the Greek state to appoint imams to state schools and mosques in Thrace.



## PM's Qatar trip seen as first step to major deals

On the second day of a visit to Qatar, Prime Minister Antonis Samaras on Wednesday sought to project an image of Greece as an investor-friendly country.

"We can give fresh momentum to investments and business opportunities," Samaras said, adding, "We are in favor of entrepreneurship and against bureaucracy."

He was speaking ahead of the first session of a new bilateral business council and a day after Athens and

Doha agreed to put 1 billion euros each into a fund to support small and medium-sized businesses in Greece.

Samaras met with the Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani on Wednesday after talks on Tuesday with Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani.

Government sources said the focus had been on realistic plans rather than ostentatious projects that might fall through, a clear reference to the decision by Doha to drop its bid

for the development of the site of Athens's former international airport at Elliniko.

The sources said the Qataris are interested in the construction and energy sectors as well as in developing regional airports and ports.

Athens is counting on European Union officials to show some flexibility on the issue of bilateral agreements and may seek its 1-billion-euro share in the bilateral SMEs fund from the European Investment Bank.

## Two sentenced over fake disability permits

A Thessaloniki court on Wednesday passed down a five-year jail sentence to the former prefect of Kilkis, Evangelos Balaskas, and a seven-year term to the former head of the local intercity bus company (KTEL) in connection with a scam involving the issuing of thousands of bogus disability permits which allowed able-bodied passengers to travel at a discount.

Both jail terms can be bought out by the convicts. The scam cost the state an estimated 1.1 million euros.

## Greece drops to 84th place in press freedom index

Levels of press freedom in Greece have deteriorated substantially over the past year, according to Reporters Without Borders, which ranked the country 84th out of 179 in its 2013 Press Freedom Index published Wednesday.

The ranking meant that Greece dropped 14 places in a year and came in just above Kosovo and Guinea. RWB labeled the decline "disturbing."

"The social and professional environment for its journalists, who are exposed to public condemnation and violence from both extremist groups and the police, is disastrous," the watchdog said.



## Two to answer for fatal Marfin bank blaze

Two-and-a-half years after three people died in an arson attack on a branch of Marfin Egnatia Bank in central Athens during an anti-austerity rally, two suspects are to face an investigative magistrate tomorrow on murder charges.

The two men have been summoned following a 32-month police investigation which focused on photographs taken at the time of the attack and witness accounts.

According to sources, the case file given to the magistrate contains the testimony of several people describing the faces of the arsonists who broke the windows of the bank on May 5, 2010, and threw firebombs into the premises. Of the witnesses summoned by the security police, several identified the two suspects as the arsonists when shown photographs of them.

In their testimony, the suspects are expected to refer to a police document which, they claim, proves there is insufficient evidence to implicate them. Relatives of Angeliki Papanthanasopoulou, a 32-year-old pregnant bank clerk who died in the Marfin bank fire with two of her colleagues, issued a statement Wednesday, saying they were waiting for closure.

"We are hoping for a conviction of the arsonists and of those at Marfin Bank, who through their criminal negligence forced their workers to suffer a torturous death, which will prove liberating for us and the memory of our loved ones," the statement said.