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Drachma Breathing Its Last as Greece Officially Enters Euro-zone

ATHENS, Greece (The National Herald, Reuters). - Greece passed an important milestone in its modern history this week when European Union leaders on Monday approved its membership in the common European currency, the euro, from January 1, 2001, making it the 12th country to join the single currency launched last year.

The official drachma conversion rate was set at 340.75 to the euro, the central parity established when the Greek currency was revalued by 3.5 percent on January 15.

As a result of this decision Europe's oldest currency, the drachma, will climb back into the history books. The famous heads of ancient heroes and deities on the drachma will disappear when Greece adopts the faceless euro notes. The only reminder of Greece on the notes will be the term ΕΥΡΩ etched underneath the term ΕΥΡΩ on every note.

Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis hailed the success of several years of austerity imposed in an

all-out effort to adapt the EU's most backward economy to join the elite monetary union, and said he expected euro membership would attract more foreign investment to Greece.

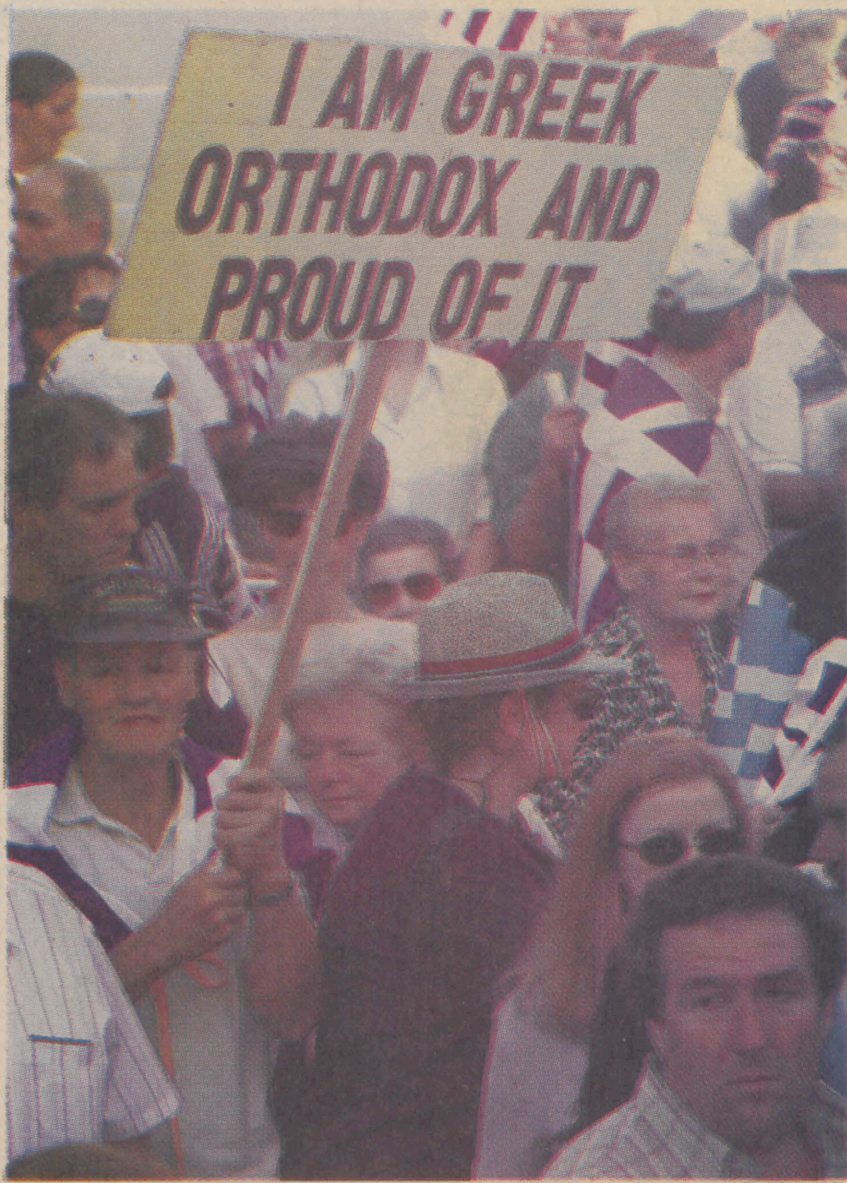
"This was a great day for us," Simitis told reporters in English. "We have made a big effort for the last years.

"We were a country that was not at the same level of development as the other countries, and it was far more difficult for us. But we have achieved it and this means that we will take part in all the policies in the EU."

Monday's decision was a formality after EU finance ministers, the European Commission and the European Central Bank all endorsed Greece's convergence with its euro-zone partners.

It was a victory for Simitis' modernizing Socialist government, which has squeezed chronic inflation out of the Greek economy and cut public deficits and debt levels to satisfy the EU convergence cri-

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A Greek holds up a sign proclaiming his faith in English at the massive rally protesting the government's policy relating to the Greek Orthodox Church.

800,000 Greeks Protest Snub to Their Church

ATHENS, Greece. (Reuters, The National Herald). - Central Athens rang with chants, hymns and avowals of faith on Wednesday as close to 800,000 thousand Greek Orthodox rallied against a government plan to remove a religion entry from state identification cards.

The faithful, including scores of black-robed Orthodox priests, chanted "Greece means Orthodoxy," hoping to stop what they see as a first step toward the complete separation of church and state.

"First they will take religion off the IDs, then they will take the cross off the Greek flag and religion will not be taught in schools. Enough is enough," the head of the Greek Church, Archbishop Christodoulos, said in a fiery speech from a podium at Syntagma square, overlooking the Greek parliament.

"We are here to shout that our faith isn't negotiable...the church once again leads the nation," Christodoulos told the crowd, which stretched through much of the city's centre.

"When the priest's robe becomes a

flag, then victory is certain," the faithful chanted back, waving a sea of Greek blue and white flags and double-headed eagle Byzantine emblems.

Greece's pro-European socialist government has vowed to replace the handwritten IDs now issued by police.

The new cards will not include information on religion, as the government intends to protect the rights of Greece's small Moslem, Jewish and non-Orthodox Christian minorities.

But what has irked the Church and millions of Greeks is that under the European Union's vague rules, Greece is not required to take this or other specific measures.

The Church has said the religion entry on the IDs should be optional and has called for a referendum. Prime Minister Costas Simitis responded that the issue was closed.

Moreover, Simitis insulted the Church leadership first by going back on a promise to hold a dialogue with the hierarchy before he proceeds with specific measures and later by imperiously refusing to meet with a Church delegation under Christodoulos.

The prime minister has also refused to rule out other such measures in the future.

Many observers point out that Simitis was less than forthcoming during the recent, March 6 general election when he failed to mention the upcoming assault on the Church, a point that infuriated many Greek faithful.

Government leaders have accused the church, which has staged two rallies within a week on the issue, of trespassing in the political arena.

Since becoming Archbishop of Athens and All Greece in the spring of 1998, Christodoulos has introduced an activist style of leadership and has raised the profile of the Church.

His message and style has enthralled many young Greeks, and attracted many young people back to the churches.

Currently his favorable rating in polls exceeds 75 percent making him the most popular leader in Greece—far above the recently re-elected prime minister or even the President of the Republic.

Behind the harsh, almost disrespectful treatment of Christodoulos by the prime minister many see an attempt by Simitis to paint the hierarch into a corner turn him into a polarizing personality and reduce his popular appeal.

In his clash with the Archbishop, Simitis has had considerable help from the majority of media organiza-

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Family Meets Politics In the Life of a State Senator

By Emmy Marcoglou
Special to The National Herald

NEW YORK. - When Nick Rerras, a native of the Greek island of Andros, jumped ship and landed in America, the land of opportunity, he could have never imagined that, one day, his son, Dimitrios Rerras would become a state Senator for the Commonwealth of Virginia. He knew, however, that he would raise his children with strong family values and work ethic, which would pave the way for their future success and personal happiness.

So, Senator Rerras, who is known as 'Nick', grew up hearing about the Greek ethos he should carry with him in life in order to excel, while always being reminded to cherish the opportunity of growing up in the United States. "My father loved this country," Rerras recalls, "he always used to say to us 'you should be thankful for growing up in America'."

And Sen. Rerras, 43, took his father's words to heart. Combining his Greek heritage with his love for America he has been serving his state and his country since January 2000, when he was elected to the 40-member Virginia State Senate, taking special pride in being the only new Republican elected in the November 1999 elections, giving the majority to the Republicans, who now hold 21 seats.

But, Rerras is even more proud for his family. In an interview with The National Herald Rerras says his family is his biggest accomplishment in life. Married to the former Gayle E. Walker he has three children, namely Costas, 7, Helena, 10, and Nicholas, 12. In his eyes, family and politics are

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Winning One For Ravaged Greece

By Dimitri C. Michalakis
Special to The National Herald

BOSTON. - The crowds were cheering at the 1946 Boston marathon, not only for the phenomenal Irishman and defending champ Johnny Kelly, who was in the lead once again, but also for a spindly-legged Greek named Stylianos Kyriakides who had arrived from war-torn Greece only weeks before vowing to win and bring the world's attention to the plight of his countrymen.

"In Greece today, there is nothing, nothing!" he told one reporter. "There are no roads, no bridges, no trams, no harbors. There is nothing, nothing except the soil of Greece and a people determined to survive and be great again." And he predicted of the race: "I think I have the strength for it. If not in my legs, then maybe here, in my heart."

The 36-year-old Cypriot had 80 medals to his credit, was the Balkans champ before the war, and had finished 11th at the infamous 1936 Berlin Olympics. But he hadn't run competitively in over six years and had barely survived the German occupation of Greece (he was picked up by a patrol and only his Olympic credentials had

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Johnny Kelly (No. 1) and Stylianos Kyriakides (No. 77) running up Heart Break Hill in Newton, MA. Kyriakides heard an old man yell "Για την Ελλάδα, για τα παιδιά σου" ("For Greece, for your children"), which spurred him on to victory.

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Excerpts From the Senate Hearing on Greece

Last week, the issue of terrorism in Greece was raised again in the United States senate, following the publication of a report by the congressionally-chartered National Commission on Terrorism which accused Greece of not cooperating fully with the U.S. in combating the phenomenon, and the assassination, three days later of the British military attache in Athens by the November 17 urban guerrilla group. The hearings were held at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which is chaired by conservative Sen. Jesse Helms (R-NC) and of which Senator Paul Sarbanes (D-MA) is a member.

Among the panel that testified were Amb. George Bremer, the president of the Commission, as well as members of the Commission and officials of the State Department. Because of the importance of the hearing we publish today those portions of the transcript that refer to Greece.

Sen. Paul Sarbanes (D-MD): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I know the chairman is anxious to

move on to the next panel, and I just have two or three questions I want to put to this panel.

First of all, I note that in the appendix where you indicated those that the commission consulted or interviewed or had discussions, that your indicate you had met with officials of a number of governments.

Mr. Bremer: Yes. Sen. Sarbanes: And in that regard, I was interested, since you pinpointed Greece and Pakistan in your report in a very pointed way, whether you met with or had discussions with any officials of those countries.

Mr. Bremer: Not with Pakistan, and I don't think with Greece. The commission itself, as a commission, did not meet with officials of those governments.

Sen. Sarbanes: But you did meet with officials of a number of governments.

Mr. Bremer: Yes, we did. We met with governments which are cooperating with us in the fight against terrorism.

Sen. Sarbanes: Well, now, I talked to Ambassador Burns, who feels that he's getting good cooperation in Greece. This is a serious problem and it's one that we've been focused on for quite some time. And I'm concerned by the suggestion here that either the prime minister or the foreign minister, both of whom are, it seems to me, very strongly committed to trying to do something about the terrorism problem, are you questioning their commitment to this? Prime Minister Simitis and Foreign Minister Papandreou?

Mr. Bremer: We took no position on the role of any particular individual in the Greek government. All we said was we thought that the record justified our recommendation that the president should consider making Greece or Pakistan a country that is not fully cooperating.

Mr. Sonnenberg: And the statements recently by the government have been rather strong and, we feel,

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At Lowell Centennial, Demetrios Supports School

By Theodore Kalmoukos
Special to The National Herald

BOSTON. - Archbishop Demetrios intervened forcefully last Sunday in favor of Lowell's Holy Trinity Hellenic-American Day School during the parish's centennial celebration.

"This school is the only full day school in New England and it is unthinkable that some day it might be closed. I am saying this very simply, it is unthinkable," the Archbishop said to the approximately 400 guests at the official centennial dinner.

Demetrios made a plea to all parish officials to do everything possible to sustain and support the school. He also emphasized the importance of Greek and Orthodox education in the United States and the need to be passed on to the new generations.

Demetrios was referring to a recent proposal by the school's departing principal, James Demos to reduce the teaching hours of the Greek language by half. Although some faculty members who supported Demos' idea, the majority of the parents rejected it out-

right. "I always remember the advice given by some theoreticians for destroying communities or nations. They advocate a very simple recipe—diminish and finally cut education. You will have as a result the captivity of the people, a catastrophe," the Archbishop said.

Consul General of Greece, George Chatzimechelakis spoke very highly of the school and presented Metropolitan Methodios of Boston with a check for \$5,000 on behalf of Greece "in support of the Greek Department" as he stated.

The parish was celebrating a dual anniversary last Sunday: Its own centennial as well as the sixtieth anniversary of former Archbishop Iakovos' ordination to priesthood, which took place at Holy Trinity.

The presence of Archbishop Demetrios, his predecessor, Archbishop Iakovos, and Metropolitan Methodios added more splendor to the festivities despite the poor attendance at the morning services. Some ascribed the

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