

# Greek premier sacks his outspoken culture minister

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By Kerin Hope in Athens

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Costas Simitis, Greece's prime minister, yesterday sacked Theodoros Pangalos, the outspoken culture minister who has overseen preparations for the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, over remarks he made in a Sunday newspaper.

Mr Pangalos, a former foreign minister, criticised the socialist government's plan for labour market reform and attacked his successor's policy of building friendly relations with Turkey.

His sacking came three days before International Olympic Committee officials were due in Athens to assess progress with preparations for the 2004 Olympics. Political infighting, some

involving Mr Pangalos, has delayed decision-making, and Greece had been threatened with losing the games to Seoul.

The prime minister said a cabinet minister could not dispute government policy in public "and cannot use unseemly language to criticise his colleagues".

Mr Pangalos was sacked as foreign minister last year over Greece's failed attempt to shelter Abdullah Ocalan, the rebel Kurdish leader, at its embassy in Kenya.

He returned to the cabinet after the Panhellenic Socialist Movement won a third term at last April's general election, but has voiced sharp criticism of George Papandreou, his successor as foreign minister, over

rapprochement with Turkey. In Sunday's interview with the Ethnos newspaper, he accused Mr Papandreou of lacking "an elementary knowledge of history".

His departure may come as a relief to Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki, the president of Athoc 2004, the organising body for the Games. His sacking sends a signal to other dissident cabinet members that Mr Simitis will take a tough line with opponents of reforms required to improve Greece's competitiveness after it becomes the 12th member of the euro on January 1.

Evangelos Venizelos, a moderniser, takes over as a culture minister, a job he held in the mid-1990s.