

THE EXILES

THRONELESS ABROAD

Time was when a monarch who'd been ousted from his throne ran the risk of also losing some essential body parts. No longer. Since Europe's last regicide, of Russia's Czar Nicholas II in 1918, deposed sovereigns have suffered only the relatively painless fate of exile, house hunting and finding alternative employment. Former King Constantine II of Greece, who left his country after a 1967 military coup, has lived in exile for more than half of his 62 years—since 1974 in the London neighborhood of Hampstead.

Constantine's chances of regaining his crown are slim, and he professes no desire to do so. He says he hasn't renounced his claim to the throne because "nobody's asked me to do that, there is no throne to renounce," but he accepts the results of a 1974 referendum in which 69% of Greeks voted in favor of a republic. "If the Greek people decide that they want a republic, they are entitled to have that and should be left in peace to enjoy it," he says. The ex-king does not, however, "particularly enjoy the idea that because I was head of state of a different kind of administration I have to be penalized 30 years later and

lose my house and my land."

In 1994 Constantine sued when the socialist government passed a law ratifying the military junta's expropriation of three family estates in Greece and stripping him of his citizenship. Until then, he carried a Greek passport—issued by the socialist government during its previous term in power—identifying him as the former King of the Hellenes. He eventually took his case before the European Court of Human Rights, which ruled that the government must either return the properties or compensate the ex-king and his family for their worth. At the court's request, Constantine and the government have submitted detailed valuations of the property. Though the government's estimate was higher than Constantine's, it has thus far refused to negotiate a settlement directly with him.

One sticking point is Constantine's refusal to use a surname. His

family's origins in Greece date from 1863, when his great-grandfather, a son of Denmark's King Christian IX, accepted the offer of the throne. "The Danish royal family doesn't have a surname," says Constantine, which is why he hasn't got one. (If he were of a feminist bent and inclined to borrow his wife's, he'd be out of luck there too, since she was born a Danish princess.) "If he wants to play commoner, then he must act like a commoner," says one



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HEADING HOME: The ex-king plans to go to Greece for the 2004 Olympics

unconvinced Greek official handling the case.

While he waits for the European court's next ruling, Constantine can bask in his initial victory and take heart from at least one recent development. Italy's exiled male royals, barred from setting foot in their ancestral country, took their grievance to the same European tribunal. Before it could rule, the Italian Senate voted to lift the prohibition, which should make further legal action unnecessary. Prince Emanuele Filiberto, 29, a hedge fund manager in Geneva, has hinted at having snuck into the country in the past. He is already well known in Italy from a stint as a football commentator for Italian television—a job he did through a remote electronic link—and his frequent appearances in glossy society magazines.

Constantine probably can't count on a change of heart from the Greek government over his confiscated residences, but he's likely to be back in his homeland in two years anyway. A gold medalist in Olympic yachting, he is an honorary member of the International Olympic Committee and as such is guaranteed the hospitality of the Greek government—at least for the duration of the Athens 2004 Summer Games. —A.L. With reporting by Anthea Carassava/Athens