

TO BHMA International edition

PAGAN:
The Greek
Band
Turning
Folk into
Ritual

By Maria Paravantes

Young and old alike are dancing, swaying as if in a trance, to the mesmerizing sound of Greek tradition gone electric. Smoke swirls through the air. Ancient forest spirits emerge from the shadows. Ecstatic maidens whirl beneath sweeping lights in a Dionysian frenzy. On stage at Athens’ Technopolis, Greek tradition is transformed into something primal, theatrical and utterly contemporary.

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the mystical world of PAGAN, a band from Greece that is breaking new ground.

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TO BHMA International edition

‘Europe
Is More Than
a Union. It’s
Our Common
Home’

By Odin Linardatou

On one of Paris’ sweltering summer days, we met Bertrand Badré, Chair of the Project Syndicate Advisory Board, on the sidelines of the Summit on Media and Democracy in Europe staged by Project Syndicate and the Meliore Foundation.

A leading voice on sustainable finance, Badré believes sustainable economies will shape the future.

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TO BHMA International edition

A Priest,
a Guitar,
and a New
View of God

By George Gilson

To many people both within Greece and abroad, Father Dionysios Tambakis comes across as an oddity, embodying an unexpected contradiction. He is an Orthodox priest, clothed in the traditional black cassock, who composes atmospheric music driven by electric guitars and inspired by the ancient melodies of Byzantine chant and at times ancient Greek scales and tonality.

Some of his pieces feature the voices of traditional Byzantine cantors, both male and female.

Within a span of months, his recordings—

which initially were available only on his own, obscure YouTube channel—now are streamed on Spotify. A limited, vinyl edition of his album, entitled “Paradise Metal”, was released, and his songs have attracted listeners from various parts of the world.

International media attention

In no time, he has drawn the attention of major international media—including recent articles in the *New York Times* and the famed music magazine Pitchfork—that have sought to fathom how heavy metal and Orthodox Christianity could possibly coexist.

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Father Dionysios with his guitar, standing in front of the altar of his Nafplio Parish of the Birth of the Virgin Mary.

TO BHMA International edition

Greece Reconsiders the Rules Governing Fish Farming

Cheryl Novak
and Myrto Polymili

The Greek government wants more from its aquaculture industry. At least that’s what the recently appointed Minister for Rural Development and Food, Margaritis Schinas, announced a few months back at the 4th Aquaculture Industry Congress in Athens.

Greek aquaculture, he said, is “without a doubt a national champion, modern export-oriented sector marked by advanced technical expertise, a substantial investment and a low environmental footprint, which is also a major source of local employment and social cohesion.” The government’s ambition is to “increase yearly production by 5% until 2030,” he said, and finish the establishment of the aquaculture industrial

zones (POAYs) that are still pending as soon as possible.

Since the conference, the ministry has also announced the approval of 105 projects worth €131 million, “including over €87 million in public funding.”

The industry’s response was largely sceptical; after all, ministers have been promising to complete the spatial governance framework for almost 15 years now.

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Abandoned mussel farm off Salamina before clean-up by Healthy Seas.

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One with the future

A Priest, a Guitar, and a New View of God

Father Dionysios of Nafplio found an international audience by uniting Byzantine spirituality with heavy metal

Continued from Page One

Yet, speaking with him, one quickly discovers that he sees no contradiction at all. His story is not about challenging tradition but about discovering how every authentic gift—even the electric guitar—can become another way of searching for God.

The first thing Father Dionysios wants you to understand is that he has never considered himself extraordinary.

He does not speak like a musician whose work has attracted an international following, nor like a priest who has unexpectedly become a cultural curiosity.

A family man: A restless spirit behind a conservative appearance

Judging by his outward appearance, you would at first think Dionysios belongs to the most conservative, out-dated brand of Orthodox clergyman. He has a full, long and unkempt beard—something like an Old Testament patriarch—and his white hair is tied at the back of his head in a bun, resembling more an Orthodox priest from the 60s and 70s than a contemporary Greek clergyman. He wears a monk's cap rather than the more formal, rigid stovepipe kalimafhi.

The 53-year-old father of three—between the ages of 20 and 30—is the parish priest at the Church of the Birth of

the Virgin Mary, in the picturesque and historic seaside town of Nafplio, in the Peloponnese. Until now, he has made his music in his own home, but there are plans for studio recordings. His youngest son works for Hellenic Telecoms in the monastic colony of Mount Athos. His eldest, a daughter, is a psychologist.

Music as a form of prayer, a universal language

His modesty is authentic, not feigned. There is no sense of self-importance in his conversation. Instead, he

Father Dionysios Tabakis, a 53-year-old Orthodox priest is based in Nafplion, Greece. Beyond his ministry, he also has a passion for heavy metal. A limited, vinyl edition of his album, entitled "Paradise Metal", has been released.

returns repeatedly to the same themes—humility, gratitude, and the conviction that whatever good has emerged from his music belongs not to him, but to God.

It is perhaps this absence of conceit that makes his story so compelling.

For most observers, Father Dionysios seems almost impossible to categorize. An Orthodox priest recording contemplative heavy metal inspired by Byzantine chant appears to bridge worlds usually regarded as incompatible. Yet, he rejects the notion that he is combining opposites. For him, music has always been a universal language through which the human soul reaches toward heaven.

"Music," he says, "is a form of prayer."

Growing up in humble circumstances

"I do not come from any distinguished, illustrious, or prominent background," he

says with characteristic simplicity when asked about his upbringing.

His childhood was spent in old Kokkinia, among families shaped by poverty and the lingering memory of displacement. Many were first- and second-generation refugees from Asia Minor, who fled Turkey in the population exchange that followed the Asia Minor Catastrophe. His own family belonged to the third generation, but material wealth was still scarce. But he remembers something infinitely more valuable: the authenticity of the people there.

"They were poor but genuine people," he recalls. "They had no reason to pretend to be anything other than who they were."

The gift of simplicity: a poor and dignified background

His parents embodied those virtues. Neither had studied beyond primary school. His father's family came from Smyrna, his mother from Crete, but what defined them most was not geography or education but character.

"I cannot remember them ever gossiping about anyone or deliberately harming another person." He underlines that neither of them ever found themselves involved in legal disputes or public quarrels.

They accepted hardship with quiet dignity, concerned only with living honestly rather than comparing themselves with others. Only later did he realize how unusual that upbringing had been.

When he became priest of the his-

toric Church of Panagitsa (Virgin Mary) in Nafplio, he found himself defending church property and navigating disputes that exposed him to jealousy, litigation, and division.

"It was something of a cultural shock," he admits. "I encountered the litigiousness, division, and envy that can exist even among otherwise educated and cultivated people."

The experience deepened rather than diminished his appreciation for the simple virtues that had shaped his childhood.

A childhood calling

His decision to become a priest was neither sudden nor dramatic. There was no conversion, no extraordinary vision, no moment of crisis.

Instead, the calling emerged naturally through the example of the priests at his home parish of Saint Nicholas in Nikaia, near Piraeus.

"They truly loved Christ," he says. More importantly, they inspired others to love Him as well. Rather than merely teaching doctrine, they demonstrated a life centred on worship, compassion, and service. They awakened in young people a love for the altar and for helping others. Their example proved decisive.

'Teacher, I want to become a priest'

One mem-

ory still makes him laugh.

During his first year of secondary school, his teacher asked every pupil to write an essay describing what they hoped to become as adults.

"I wrote, 'A priest.'"

The response completely bewildered his teacher, who happened to hold strongly atheistic views. "My answer threw her into confusion," he recalls with a smile.

He later studied at the Higher Ecclesiastical Academy of Athens in Kifissia, years he remembers as filled with hope, friendships, and dreams for the future. Looking back, however, he credits neither academic study nor intellectual argument for his vocation. It began with the quiet witness of ordinary parish priests whose lives reflected the Gospel.

An unexpected international audience

The attention that eventually surrounded Father Dionysios arrived almost by accident.

For years he quietly maintained a YouTube channel, uploading original music inspired by Byzantine chant and dedicated especially to the Virgin Mary. These recordings were acts of personal devotion rather than public performance.

At the same time, another fascination was taking shape. He found himself increasingly interested in exploring the relationship between different musical traditions. Rather than viewing genres as competing identities, he saw them as different dialects within the same universal language.

A call from Thessaloniki

Then came an unexpected message. A producer from Thessaloniki, Nikos Chatzilaskaris, contacted him despite never having met him. Hesitantly, he suggested releasing some of Father Dionysios' recordings in England.

From there, everything changed.

The music gradually reached listeners across Europe and beyond. Reviews appeared. Journalists began calling. Before long, respected international publications had taken notice of a Greek Orthodox priest creating music unlike anything they had encountered before.

'As a priest I draw my inspiration from the Divine Liturgy. The Liturgy transcends both time and place; it moves within eternity.

I want my music to inhabit that same beautiful, timeless, and metaphysical atmosphere.'



“A surprising number of Greek and international media outlets have featured me,” he says, sounding almost embarrassed, “as though I were some great and celebrated musician.”

He remains deeply uncomfortable with celebrity. He says he often left his telephone switched off, preferring obscurity to publicity.

“In Greece, it is often better not to attract too much attention,” he says, with more than a touch of suspicion toward the Greek media.

Quoting Christ’s words that, “No prophet is accepted in his own land”, he explains that fame can easily become spiritually dangerous if it distracts from one’s mission. His response has been to navigate this unfamiliar territory with “prudence, humility, and prayer.”

Music as prayer: a soul searching for God

To understand Father Dionysios’ music, one must first understand what music means to him. It is not simply performance. Nor is it mere entertainment.

“For me,” he says, “music is a form of prayer.”

Alongside what he calls “the primordial cry that rises from the depths of the human soul,” he places an instrument few would expect an Orthodox priest to celebrate: the electric guitar.

“Strange as it may sound,” he says, “the guitar—especially the fretless guitar—can express the intensity, the longing, and the cry of a soul thirsting for God.”

The very word metal, he notes, reminds him of the ancient Greek verb metallō—to seek, to search, to explore.

Whether understood linguistically or symbolically, the image captures his artistic vision perfectly.

Penetrating the heart with his guitar

“I use the electric guitar,” he says, “as a means of exploring the depths of my own heart, where the Kingdom of Heaven lies hidden.”

His own relationship with the instrument is surprisingly recent.

Only about a year before this interview, he bought an inexpensive electric guitar as an experiment. Yet the musical influences of his youth—hip-hop, breakdance, and the sounds of the 1980s—had never left him. Rather than abandoning those influences when he entered the priesthood, he wondered whether they might be brought into conversation with the ancient musical language of Byzantine worship.

The heavy metal component of his music – which he uniquely combines with Byzantine chant (he is quite



Father Dionysios praying before the icon of the Virgin Mary, at the church where he serves.

a good cantor in some of his songs) and ancient Greek musical scales – is rooted in Doom Metal. Yet, presumably because the word doom does not at all jive with the salvational, teleological core of Orthodox Christianity – the Resurrection of Christ – he has “baptized” it “Paradise Metal”.

Blasting Dubai, Saudis and the Gulf potentates

While most of his songs are based on Orthodox hymnography, he has not shied away from scathing socio-political criticism and biting satire.

On this score, the song “Dubai Is Gone” is indeed explosive: “Dubai you’re finished, the party’s over. Finito, party animals.

“Rich Saudis, all petroleum magnates, the bombs are dropping like rain, the orgies are over and the public square has emptied, take your toy pail and go to another beach [a Greek phrase for get lost].

“Dubai, contemporary Babel, the Gomorra of the rich, for you, bankruptcy is golden, and it is drawing near.

“Mullahs and sheiks living in opulence, with a soul blackened by filth and bitterness, your life of gorging has dried up, your [oil] deposits from Hades were taken and scattered by a Persian ship...”

Birds of the forest sing with different voices at once

Too often, he argues, musicians retreat into opposing camps. Traditionalists dismiss contemporary sounds as inherently suspect, while progressives regard Byzantine music as hopelessly outdated. He believes both attitudes impoverish music itself. “They complement one another beautifully.”

“If the only birds al-

‘I use the electric guitar, as a means of exploring the depths of my own heart, where the Kingdom of Heaven lies hidden.’

lowed to sing in the forest were the ones whose songs we personally preferred, the forest would become a dull and lifeless place.”

Heavy metal was created by God

Perhaps no phrase better captures Father Dionysios’ outlook than his startling declaration that “heavy

metal was created by God.”

He immediately explains what he means.

Heavy metal, he insists, is not a single ideology, but a broad musical tradition encompassing many different expressions. Some undoubtedly embrace darkness or anti-religious themes. Others do not.

“A knife,” he says, “can be used for good or for evil.”

What first attracted him to heavy metal was not rebellion for its own sake but the extraordinary expression and power of the electric guitar. Its commanding presence could communicate longing, struggle, hope, and transcendence with unusual intensity.

For many years, he says, people assumed heavy

metal was inherently diabolical. He rejects that assumption entirely. “The devil cannot create anything truly worthwhile. Only God, the Creator, can do that.” The electric guitar itself, he argues, is a gift born from human creativity—a creativity ultimately grounded in God.

“If the Evil One [the devil] chooses to appropriate one of God’s gifts for darkness,” he says, “while we refuse to use that same gift for good, that is deeply disappointing.”

His aim is therefore not to imitate secular heavy metal but to redeem its expressive possibilities.

Sui Generis: beyond labels

Listeners often describe Father Dionysios’ work as Doom Metal because of its slow tempos, resonant guitar tones, and contemplative atmosphere.

Doom Metal is a slow tempo genre of heavy metal. It has two sides to it: Religious content on the one hand and the sorrowful, melancholic, depressive heartache elements on the other.

Many doom bands - like Black Sabbath, Candlemass, and Cathedral deal with religion and some sorrowful things. These bands quite often wear Christian Crosses, whether they are actually religious or just for show.

Father Dionysios accepts the influence of Doom Metal on his music but he is careful to underline that the comparison hardly tells the whole story.

His music, he says, cannot really be confined within labels.

It draws instead upon the modal traditions of Ancient Greek and Byzantine music, creating something simulta-

neously ancient and new.

One piece is entitled “Hymn of Euripides” (from 480 BC) which he has set to music and reads, while the video shows the Trojan Horse moving.

If conventional doom metal often explores occult symbolism or haunted landscapes, his music seeks prayerful contemplation. The resemblance lies only in atmosphere.

“As a priest,” he says, “I draw my inspiration from the Divine Liturgy. The Liturgy transcends both time and place; it moves within eternity. I want my music to inhabit that same beautiful, timeless, and metaphysical atmosphere.”

A gentle mission

For all the attention his music has received, Father Dionysios repeatedly returns to his own single truth.

“For me, Christ is everything.” Yet, he notes, because Christ never forces Himself upon anyone, neither should Christians.

His music therefore avoids aggressive preaching or overt proselytism. Instead, he hopes simply to create beauty and allow God to work quietly within each listener.

“I try to maintain a holy gentleness and kindness,” he says, “without aggressive, propagandistic, or intrusive tones.”

His audience reflects that subtleness. It includes Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, and atheists. He recalls, with obvious delight, receiving a congratulatory message from a rabbi.

“We love them all,” he says. “If, through the musical phrases we compose, their souls receive joy and hope, then that is enough. There is no greater happiness than helping another human being breathe a little more freely.”

Christ’s little donkey

One final question remains. How does Father Dionysios perceive and handle all the attention now focused upon him? To answer, he turns to the Gospel.

“When Christ entered Jerusalem, crowds spread garments and palm branches before Him. Yet another participant, however, shared in that joyful procession. The little donkey.”

“The little donkey,” Father Dionysios says, “shared in some of the glory and honour. Not because anyone admired the animal itself, but because it carried Christ.”

“I am happy and honoured,” he continues, “to feel that I am Christ’s little donkey, upon whom hope, joy, and the Good News are proclaimed through the music we are striving to bring forth.”



Portrait of Father Dionysios, painted with the technique of Byzantine iconography, from his archive.

PAGAN: The Greek Band Turning Folk into Ritual

Fire. Masks. Rhythm. *TO BHMA International Edition* meets PAGAN band leader Stavros Tsumanis to explore the vision behind the band's powerful live performances

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Following an amazing performance, *TO BHMA International Edition* sat down with composer and band founder Stavros Tsumanis to discuss PAGAN's story, philosophy and vision.

The group features Greek-Syrian actress and vocalist Evelyn Assouad, bassist Pantelis Petrou, guitarist and vocalist Vassilis Prodromou, and guitarists Stavros Tsumanis and Dimitris Bizos. Together they have crafted a captivating spectacle that combines choreography, elaborate costumes, lighting design and storytelling. This is not your usual concert; it's a rite of passage.

More than a name

Although PAGAN officially came together during the pandemic and have been performing for the past four years, the idea behind the project goes back almost two decades, to when Tsumanis embarked on extensive musical research with "strong historical and anthropological dimensions." That process gradually led to the formation of what he describes as an "artistic movement", later named PAGAN.

The choice of name, he explains, was totally spontaneous and instinctive.

"I came across the Latin word 'paganus', which originally referred to someone from the countryside," he says. Over time, however, the word acquired a dismissive tone. Urban elites used it to describe rural communities as uncultured villagers, disconnected from the sophistication of the cities.

"As someone who grew up in a village before moving to the 'illustrious city' to study and work in the arts, I also felt like a 'paganus'," Tsumanis says.

"Through music, I wanted to bring the sound of the countryside back into the city. So our name combines both symbolism and satire."

Unlike any folk band you've ever heard

Trying to define PAGAN's sound is almost impossible. Tsumanis resists musical labels but is sure that "many will feel lured into the dark fairy tales and myths of our ancestors."

When I ask about the band's connection to Greek



PAGAN's lead singer Greek-Syrian actress and vocalist Evelyn Assouad: beyond her impressive voice and commanding presence, Assouad brings to the stage a raw, unfiltered passion that is hard to find nowadays.

tradition, his answer is unexpected.

"I would say something awakened within us, something that connected us to an ancestral memory which we felt a profound need to recall."

The band's greatest inspirations, he explains, are the eternal forces that have shaped humanity from the beginning. "The mysteries of human existence and the two great forces of life: love and death."

These themes, he argues, belong to no single culture. "Set against the crisis of values that defines our era, they can serve as common ground, reminding us of what unites us."

As for tradition, Tsumanis is quick to point out that it has no need of reproduction. Instead, it invites every generation to translate it into its own era.

"Traditions die when they cease to evolve. Tradition is not a museum, but a way of conversing with the timelessly human."

PAGAN: the spectacle

Attending a PAGAN concert feels more like taking part in a ritual. The powerful mix of traditional Greek folk song (demotika) electrified by modern instruments and enriched with the sounds of other folk traditions literally forces audiences into a primal state of freedom and connection.

That energy emanates from as much in what audiences see as in what they hear. Every performance un-

folds as a carefully choreographed theatrical production in which music, movement, costumes and lighting become inseparable.

"The creative process often begins with an image, an idea or an experience," Tsumanis explains. "All our influences, conscious and unconscious, stop being references and become the creative material that shapes our artistic identity."

The theatrical dimension, he says, emerged organically rather than by design. "What happens on stage is the natural development of our music through sound, image, word and physical presence," Tsumanis tells *TO BHMA International Edition*.

"I would say the theatrical element connects people

more deeply still than simply rousing them."

Timeless tradition

In the last few years, there is an evident turn of younger generations in Greece to tradition, whether it's learning traditional Greek dances that go back centuries, playing folk instruments, or even learning how to make the intricate outfits their great grandmothers wore.

PAGAN has become part of this wider cultural resurgence, tapping into the songs and tales of yesteryear and sending forth a message.

"Each generation receives this inheritance, assimilates it and passes it on, leaving its own unique imprint," Tsumanis says. "That's why traditions that have traveled through centuries can never truly be lost."

Long before recordings existed, he notes, songs survived precisely because they changed. No one knew exactly how a song sounded one or two centuries earlier. Music passed from person to person, constantly evolving through additions, variations, and re-interpretations.

"Evolution is not the exception to tradition; it is tradition's very nature."

Today's recordings of great traditional musicians, he says, provide valuable points of reference, allowing artists to move forward creatively without severing ties to the past. "We don't impose ourselves on tradition. To the contrary, we continue the discourse."

Completing the vision

It took Tsumanis years of re-

search to bring PAGAN to life. The dream came full circle when award-winning actress-singer Evelyn Assouad joined the group.

"Evelyn's deep connection with ancient tragedy played a decisive role in bringing forth the dramaturgy of sound and speech," Tsumanis says. "That was when we realized our performances should be approached as theatrical productions."

From that point on, the elements that now define PAGAN's artistic identity—the costumes, stage design, and lighting—evolved to frame and elevate the music.

Beyond borders

When I asked how he would describe PAGAN to someone unfamiliar with Greece and its traditions, Tsumanis hesitates. "This is such a difficult question and one we also ask our audience and fans. So far, no two answers have been the same. Each person perceives our sound through their own lens and through the elements that resonate most with them."

If pressed, he settles on "progressive ethnic" – music rooted firmly in tradition while remaining open to evolution. "The core of our work is tradition," he says, "but its expression can take different forms depending on what each composition demands."

For the band members, music is a way to explore shared human experiences beyond cultural boundaries. They see collaboration as an opportunity to discover humanity's shared roots and build bridges across languages and borders.

A space for connection

So what does the future hold for PAGAN? Tsumanis says success is not measured by fame or commercial milestones, but by the legacy the group leaves behind. He hopes PAGAN will create music that carries the essence of humanity's ancestral memory; a body of work that will inspire future generations to create freely, unconstrained by convention.

Ultimately, he says, the journey always matters more than the destination.

"The point is to create a place where human beings connect," he says. "That, after all, is the very foundation of what it means to be human."



The mysteries of human existence and the two great forces of life: love and death are the inspiration behind PAGAN's unique musical storytelling.

By Adam Chandler
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

You could say that frozen-yogurt trends come in crazes, not phases. In the 1990s, fro-yo nurtured a dubious reputation for healthiness summed up by George Costanza shrieking in disbelief on “Seinfeld,” “How could this not have any fat?”

In the mid 2000s, buzzy brands like Pinkberry and Red Mango brought fro-yo back to the forefront with distinctly tart flavors, fresh fruit toppings and celebrity followings. Yogurts from this era often also claimed to be fat-free, but had a fair amount of sugar per serving.

Now, a new frozen-yogurt craze is being spurred by gut health, luxe vibes, long lines—and customers posting online about those lines.

Driving the interest are several fast-proliferating chains that offer probiotic-rich yogurts made with cultured milks that contain healthy bacteria. These yogurts are also showing up at establishments of yore, like 16 Handles, and on menus of haute cuisine restaurants like Lupi & Iris in Milwaukee, Wis., and The Little Inn at Washington, in Washington, Va.

Probiotic frozen yogurts, which contain healthy fats and more protein than other versions, align with the types of high-protein diets that have taken off with the boom in GLP-1 weight-loss medications. That many are offered with highly Instagrammable toppings like fresh honeycomb has only added to their allure at a time when high inflation has led consumers to seek small indulgences.

According to the research firm Circana, frozen-yogurt servings sold in the U.S. between March 2025 and March 2026 rose by 26% compared with the previous year. Sales of packaged frozen yogurt also increased 24% year-over-year domestically, according to data from NIQ, a consumer-research firm.

Among the new guard of probiotic fro-yo purveyors is Myka, a chain from Madrid that sells frozen Greek yogurt. Founded in 2023, it now has stores in Paris, Miami, Mexico City and, as of this year, three locations in New York City. Earlier this month, at one of its outposts in Manhattan, people were lining up outside in 92-degree heat before the store had even opened. Silvia Hartman, a retired New Yorker in her 80s, had bumped into her neighbors there the day before, and was told to arrive

Frozen Yogurt is Back. But Not As You Might Remember It.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Forces driving the latest fro-yo craze include gut health—and social-media-induced FOMO



Myka, a Spanish chain, specializes in frozen Greek yogurt.



early. “They said, ‘Come before it opens or else you’ll be waiting around the corner!’”

Myka’s fro-yo is served with toppings like extra-virgin olive oil, diced figs, Maldon salt and a hazelnut cream mixed with the crunch of kataifi, an ingredient made famous by Dubai chocolate. A 2-ounce kiddie cup with a topping like shredded baklava will set you back about \$10 with tax. At similar fro-yo chains across the U.S., like Mimi’s, KALA, Culture Club and Go Greek, some customers have said they have paid upwards of \$20 for larger sizes and more toppings.

16 Handles, founded in 2008, started selling its probiotic frozen yogurt—a kefir soft serve—in January. It and others have come at a time when more people, particularly Gen Z-ers, are replacing alcohol with wellness. The chain, which has doubled its store count in the last three years, doesn’t open a location with fewer than 25 seats.

“The ‘Let’s meet at a bar’ is just not a thing as much as it used to be,” said 16 Handles CEO Neil Hershman. That’s where a frozen yogurt spot fills a big void.”

On a recent Tuesday evening, a 16 Handles store in Manhattan was filled with teens idling at tables and charging their phones. Down the block, at Anita Gelato, an international chain founded in 1998 that now also has a devout fro-yo following, I encountered another line of people.

I waited 20 minutes to order its cultured-milk frozen yogurt—my second fro-yo of the day and my fifth that week. My 2-ounce cup, piled high with Anita’s original tart flavor, set me back about \$9. While any line for fro-yo is usually too long for this grouchy reporter, after trying versions at Myka, Pinkberry, 16 Handles and Mimi’s, Anita won out on simplicity, freshness and light texture.

Others who waited patiently for their fro-yo at Anita included Sydney Allard, a recent law school graduate in her mid-20s. Allard, who has an upcoming clerkship with the Supreme Court, noted how some of its jurists are also fans. Justice Elena Kagan refers to herself as the “frozen yogurt justice” and even had a fro-yo machine installed in the court’s canteen.

Jonathan Staley, a consultant in his mid-20s, had returned to Anita after going there recently on a date with his girlfriend. “We’ve been here before and always had gelato,” he said. Then his girlfriend told him about the frozen yogurt. “So I tried it last week, and now I’m back for a second round.”

Greece Reconsiders the Rules Governing Fish Farming

As Greece sets new growth targets for aquaculture, a consensus has formed that the system meant to govern the sector is far from fit-for-purpose

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The proposed POAYs, an acronym for “Areas of Organized Development of Aquaculture Activities,” have become increasingly contested in recent years in both the court of law and the court of public opinion. Some coastal communities have begun to actively fight the proposed expansions, in some cases because they have witnessed for themselves the damage left behind by abandoned fish farms.

The conflict that won't go away

The Mayor of Poros, George Koutouzis, has become a central political figure in fighting the development of fish farms in his region. He told *TO BHMA International Edition* that industrial fish farming is incompatible with his island's tourism industry.

Sitting in his Poros office just moments before a meeting of the 12 local mayors who form the spine of the “Blue Municipalities” network, he talked about the need for all stakeholders to participate on equal terms in the decision-making process for the island's development. “In an organized country with democratic values, municipalities and communities should have a substantive say in their own development. “Visibly frustrated, he added that “they have been trying to force this specific industry on us for 15 years, when 99% of the people here simply don't want it.”

As the Blue Municipalities meeting unfolded, the discussion focused on aquaculture's environmental impact and on how to address marine waste stemming from aquaculture activities and abandoned fish farms.

In their remarks, most of the mayors adopted a more nuanced view on aquaculture, explaining to the public that they are not against the industry, and that they are not all against fish farming. Instead, their objections relate to specific concerns: the right to formulate their own development plans, the burden fish farms place on areas that already support tourism, fishing and other industries, and the location and density of the farms. They also wonder how cash-strapped municipalities can be expected to manage the inevitable impacts fish farms will have, when they lack the authority, expertise, funding and tools to either



Waste from abandoned aquaculture site being offloaded to shore in Salamina during clean-up by Healthy Seas.

monitor farms or remove abandoned equipment.

Salamina Mayor George Panagopoulos described a region that is already dealing with the cumulative pressures of the aquaculture industry, refineries, shipping and other industrial activities in an area of historical significance with archeological sites. “How many pressures can our sea withstand?” he asked the audience, stressing the need for Greece to conclude its maritime spatial planning and to bear in mind the carrying capacity of the local environment when doing so.

Poros has successfully fought off the establishment of a POAY off its shores—for

now. Still, the mayor is concerned that the issue may somehow be revived. Meanwhile, several other legal challenges have been launched against the establishment of POAYs in several other regions by a combination of stakeholders.

The case for reform

Xiromero, an area far from the Saronic islands on the west coast of Greece, presents a more complex view of the realities of aquaculture. While an active community is organizing opposition against the existing POAYs, Mayor John Triantafyllakis is more measured. Talking to *TO BHMA International Edition*,

he stresses that Xiromero is a relatively poor region that is battling depopulation. As he sees it, problems such as environmental pollution can and should be addressed with better regulation and monitoring, and with a strategy that seeks to balance aquaculture with other forms of development.

Some of the loudest calls for reform have come from within the aquaculture industry. Among them, the Hellenic Aquaculture Producers Association (HAPO) has long argued that incomplete zoning legislation (POAYs), slow licensing, and administrative uncertainty deter investment. Talking to *TO BHMA International Edition*, Apostolos

Touralias, HAPO President, is adamant that the sector has been pushing not only for the final green light for the POAY framework, but also for its revision.

“As an industry, we have spent two years asking for a revised framework to be completed by November 2026; obviously, that's not happening. A revision could resolve existing issues, such as matters concerning local community participation, public consultation; it could even reassess where POAYS are going to be established,” Touralias underlined. “We are certain that, if and when the revision process commences and assuming good faith from

all parties, we can table the problems we have encountered over the last 15 years and find solutions that work for everyone.”

The issue of public consultation and the way it's conducted has been a recurring concern for the impacted municipalities. The story of how the mayor of Poros and the municipality was informed that the POAY proposed for their island was just months away from approval, without any meaningful consultation with the local community, is telling. Koutouzis has described how he had just two days to prepare his case against the POAY and send it to Athens.

Eva Douzinas, a Greek-American whose family hails from Poros, is president of the Rauch Foundation and currently one of the most prominent voices against open-pen fish farming. She was on the island when Koutouzis got the news, and she remembers how stressful it was. “Part of the problem for local communities is that, even when they are given all of the information about proposed POAYs well in advance, the information is highly technical, relies on complicated environmental modeling, and the anticipated environmental impacts are not clearly communicated,” she says. “It's hard for communities to engage meaningfully with the process.”

A reckoning and fail safes

Another point of convergence among all sides of the debate is the need to push for harsher penalties for operators that violate environmental rules or abandon equipment once they wrap up their operations. Over the last couple of years, both the national and international media have spotlighted the problem of abandoned ghost-farms, forcing a conversation around the issue.

According to the HAPO president, the “law clearly states that a business owner who ceases operations for any reason is obliged to restore the area to exactly the condition it was in before they set the fish farm up. At least as far as moorings, cages, and equipment go. The problem is that the administrative fine for failing to do so is far too low. So, our suggestion is to make the fine a thousand times larger.”

The NGO Healthy Seas has argued that Greece could also consider obliging companies to buy bankruptcy insurance as part of the licensing



TO BHMA International Edition at the Blue Municipality Network on Poros island on June 22.

procedure, which is common in the EU context. The Secretary General for the Environment, Petros Varelidis, confirms that a fine structure is in place, but that it is not always implemented by the relevant authorities and the ministry would have to consider the proposal of Healthy Seas closely.

For Touralias, tougher penalties are part of a broader argument the industry is attempting to make, regarding the sector's intentions and stance: namely, that—unlike other producer-polluters—aquaculture professionals cannot afford a degraded environment. “There are industries that pollute, but it does not affect their end product,” he argues. “But our industry is immersed in its marine environment. That’s where our fish live and breathe; that’s where our assets are. So, if the system collapses, if oxygen levels drop, it means sick or dead fish, stunted growth, and poor production results. So even if you assume we’re all completely callous, if we want to make money as a business, we have to be the first to protect the environment we operate in, since it affects the health of our fish.”

Despite the industry’s proclamations that it relies on healthy ecosystems, critics of the industry contest it directly: reviews funded by Eva Douzina’s Rauch Foundation analyzing how environmental modeling has been applied argue the sector understates its footprint rather than guards against it.

The autumn review

For over a decade, the Greek government insisted that the regulatory framework and governance of the aquaculture sector did not need reform. But now, after years of intense scrutiny, public backlash, and pressure from multiple stakeholders on every side, it appears reform is on the table.

Addressing the environmental challenges posed by aquaculture, the Secretary General Spiros Protopsaltis of the Ministry of Rural Development and Food reveals to *TO BHMA International Edition* that “The Ministry is working to establish the appropriate institutional tools to facilitate more effective environmental monitoring. This effort will also be supported by legislative provisions that are expected to be submitted to Parliament shortly.”

Protopsaltis also recognizes the importance of meaningful public consultation as means of combating misinformation and assuring transparency in the development of POAYs: “In many areas, concerns about environmental impact, the scale and concentration of production, tourism, fisheries, visual impact, monitoring, enforcement and the long-term use of coastal space are genuine and



Industry leaders, government officials and researchers take part in a panel discussion during the invitation-only Aquaculture Congress 2026, organized by AMBIO at the Megaron Athens International Conference Centre in Athens on May 15–16, 2026.

legitimate. Local communities are entitled to receive clear answers based on reliable and accessible information. At the same time, parts of the public debate may be affected by incomplete information, misunderstanding of available information, or misinformation.

For example, the overall boundaries of a proposed POAY may sometimes be interpreted as an area that will be entirely occupied by aquaculture installations, although the actual zones of production may represent only a part of the wider planning area. The increase in opposition is therefore likely to reflect a combination of factors: legitimate environmental and spatial concerns, the long delays in finalizing clear spatial rules, limited trust in monitoring and enforcement, prior experiences from older or poorly managed installations, insufficiently accessible consultation documents and, in certain cases, inaccurate information.”

‘Success will not be measured solely by the number of tons of fish produced. It should also be measured through the value and quality of production, export performance, the creation of employment and economic activity in island and coastal areas, traceability, resource and energy efficiency, resilience to climate change, fish health and biosecurity, and measurable environmental indicators.’

Mr. Spiros Protopsaltis
Secretary General
for Rural Development
and Food

Protopsaltis admits that there is also a broader issue of what he calls “confidence in governance,” explaining that “When spatial-planning procedures remain unfinished for many years, this leads to uncertainty for local communities and responsible businesses alike. Clear rules and timelines, plus effective enforcement, are essential for both sides.”

The uncertain pathway to growth

So how will Greece reach the goal of 5% growth set by Minister Schinas? Protopsaltis clarifies that “the proposed increase is not an annual target; it’s for 5% growth by 2030.”

Moreover, “the overall objective is not simply to produce more,” Protopsaltis, explains. Neither does it “amount to a general or automatic commitment to expand every existing facility, issue new licences in every area, or adopt a single production model, whether off-

shore, coastal or land-based. Any increase in production must remain compatible with the environmental carrying capacity of the receiving area, the environmental conditions attached to each license, the applicable spatial-planning framework, and the need to avoid or manage conflicts with other uses of the marine and coastal space.”

Along these lines, the €4 million package that was just announced aims to support the organized operation and environmental monitoring of approved POAYs, including aquatic-environment programs, operating studies, environmental protection, and public information. Applications can be submitted until Dec. 29, 2028, and funded work must be completed by the end of 2029, Protopsaltis notes.

On the timeline for the establishment of the rest of Greece’s POAYs, the secretary general hinted that the process is bound to take time. Protopsaltis noted that spatial planning is essential “for responsible investment and for the protection of the environment and coastal areas.” They have taken longer than expected, as they are a “complex, multi-stage institutional process” which “forms part of Greece’s broader national spatial-planning framework, for which the Ministry of Environment and Energy is the competent authority.”

Moreover, the secretary general underscored that, in “areas where a POAY has not yet been approved, new licences for the establishment of aquaculture units cannot be issued.”

The ministry, Protopsaltis underlines, supports “clearer and more comparable technical requirements, reliable baseline data, better consideration of cumulative impacts at the level of a wider coastal

area or POAY, and improved coordination between licensing, environmental and monitoring authorities.”

Warmer seas, narrower margins

Greece’s aquaculture debate has exposed the depth and breadth of the challenges and governance failures that have plagued the sector. The Greek government acknowledges that communities have legitimate questions about consultation, environmental oversight, accountability, and the ability to shape coastline development at a local level, while also recognizing the frustrations of the industry where regulatory uncertainty threatens investment and competitiveness.

For now, the parties involved appear, finally, to be converging on the need to reform the spatial planning framework and turn the page. It is a very Greek sort of progress: a perpetual suspension, frustrating to all sides, that has at last produced enough exasperation to force everyone to face up to the issue.

But another debate—which may prove to be the most critical—is already emerging.

Scientists and industry figures point to marine heatwaves, disease and biosecurity as growing operational risks. Industry representatives say technology, veterinary management, and offshore production can help farms adapt. Yet some scientists—and even industry representatives—question expansion under environmental conditions that are increasingly difficult to predict.

So while Greece works on revamping its off-shore aquaculture governance framework, whether or not the industry can adapt to new environmental pressures may ultimately become the industry’s defining challenge.

Fast Facts About Greece’s Aquaculture Industry

- **Current Production Capacity:** 140,000 tonnes and around €800 million in value, 85% of which is seabass and seabream.
- **Number of farms:** 285 (2024 data, source HAPO, Minargic)
- **Number of aquaculture companies:** 73 (2024 data, source HAPO)
- **Main markets for farmed fish:** 18% sold in GR, 72% exported to EU-27, 10% exported to 16 third countries (HAPO 2024)
- **Number of POAYs:** Planned 25, Approved 7, Pending 2 (HAPO 2026)
- **New Investment Package:** 105 projects worth €131 million, including €87 million in public funding
- **Operational support package:** €4 million for the operation and environmental monitoring of approved POAYs (Hellenic Ministry of Rural Development and Food)



‘Europe is More Than a Union. It’s Our Common Home’

Reflecting on climate, competitiveness and Europe’s place in a changing world, Bertrand Badré makes the case that today’s crises should be seen as an opportunity for renewal rather than decline

Continued from Page One

But after the COVID-19 pandemic, and the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, climate action is facing growing political resistance, while economic security and competitiveness have moved to the top of the agenda.

In this new global landscape, can sustainability remain the driving force for the future?

I think that, as the Anglo-Saxons say, we are living in interesting times. On the one hand, you get the feeling when you read the news or listen to political discussions that the whole issue of sustainability and climate change has become ideological—to the extent that some people portray it as a “woke” issue. And it’s true, it is becoming political in so far as it is making the position of a number of decision-makers far more difficult, particularly in the business world.

I don’t think any country can reasonably bet today that its future will be based on fossil fuels. Even the Gulf countries—which, of course, want to extract as much value as possible today, while there is still time—are all preparing for the post-oil, post-gas era. What’s more, in the US, Texas is now the leading renewable energy state.

That’s the reality of the situation, so don’t allow yourself to be paralyzed by what you hear. The new global landscape is important, yes, and it is creating tension, stress, and communication issues, along with a degree of slow-down. But the movement has started, even if it is not as fast, as big, or as game-changing as we hoped. I recently met with the CEO of one of the largest French industrial companies, and he told me there is no longer a single month where he doesn’t face a natural disaster at one of his factories. He has to incorporate this reality.

So people do get it. But they have to adapt to the political circumstances. We are at a strange juncture that’s a lot like being at sea: the surface waves have changed direction, which is scary, but the current remains constant underneath.

The recurring heatwaves in France have reignited the debate over air



Bertrand Badré speaking at the Summit on Media and Democracy in Europe at Quai d’Orsay in Paris, France, on June 30, 2026.

conditioning. Is this a sign that we need to rethink our approach to climate adaptation?

This isn’t the real discussion; the real question is whether we are serious about defeating climate change. And more importantly, can we help Africa, Latin America, and Asia make their transition?

That, for me, is the biggest challenge we face today, and one we are not addressing as the EU.

Can the European Union still play a leading role?

Today, we seem to be faced with three very different approaches. The United States has largely stepped back from international climate commitments. The European Union still supports the Green Deal, but is increasingly balancing it against competitiveness, security, and geopolitical concerns. While China is positioning itself as a major player in the green transition.

In essence, China has a very simple message: “We are going to be the first sustainable superpower of the 21st century, with or without you.” Importantly, this goes beyond establishing norms. It’s a trade policy. And it’s an industrial policy.

Currently, they produce 80% of all solar components, 80% of battery components, and 80% of wind components—which is irritating, because it could have been us. Today, 10% of the cars

sold in Europe are Chinese electric vehicles. I mean, we could have done the same. And we mustn’t blame China, because we could have done it ourselves. So, can we switch gears? Because I’m convinced that is what we need to do.

Can we switch? Can Europe become competitive again? Because right now we are having to deal with increased defense spending along with growing inequalities.

But we have massive savings. We are underinvesting. Our savings are going to America. That’s what Mario Draghi said: we export all our savings to

America. If we can mobilize our savings at home, we will have enough money to do this. It’s a question of coordination, political will, and clear guidance. We are still the largest trade power in the world. We still have top-quality higher education. We are still very industrial, with industrial champions all over Europe.

So, the question is this: can we mobilize these strengths and these assets? Can we stand up and say: “Yes, we can also be a sustainable superpower.” It’s true that this was our ambition ten years ago, but we passed the torch to the Chinese in the meantime. I mean, it terrifies me to see Volkswagen announcing

100,000 layoffs. Do you know what that means in Germany?

Many people are worried about jobs and competitiveness, especially if major economies like Germany are faced with rising unemployment.

This is a moment where we essentially need to unite and do something. That’s easier said than done, I know. If all you do is check your news feed, you’ll be paralyzed. You’ll say, “Game over.” The extreme right is on the verge of power. In France, possibly. In the UK, where the political situation is shifting; and while it’s not the EU anymore,

it’s not that far away. And in Germany too, with the AfD. If you look at them one by one, you’ll think we are finished.

I don’t want to say I’m optimistic or pessimistic. Like Jean Monnet used to say: “I’m not optimistic, I’m not pessimistic, I’m just committed to act.” So that is what we are trying to do today. My being optimistic or pessimistic doesn’t change anything. But I think we have to tell people—to convince people—that it’s not a lost cause. The war isn’t over; it’s still worth fighting for. To a certain extent, the Ukraine story is fascinating. When I heard that Russia had launched its invasion, I remember saying “My God, those guys are going to collapse within three days.” And now, four years later, not only haven’t they collapsed, they have built the best defense industry anywhere on the planet.

Nothing is inevitable. Why should 450 million Europeans need the money of 300 million Americans to stop 150 million Russians? We are 450 million people living in rich countries with huge savings and an enormous technological and industrial infrastructure. There is no reason to be fatalistic. During COVID, we managed to raise 800 billion euros together. And there is nothing to stop us from doing it again. And maybe this time round, with Germany under pressure, we will come to the table and say, “Let’s discuss it.” As Monnet said, Europe moves forward after each crisis. So maybe this crisis will help us take the next step.

Europeans may be scared, but they still trust Europe. There is no country in which the majority wants to leave the EU. On top of that, you have Norway, Iceland, Montenegro, and a number of other countries clamoring to join. What’s that if not a signal? But we have to make it clear that Europe is more than a Union. It’s our common home.

I come from Alsace, on the German border. My family home was commandeered by the Hitler Youth during the war. But my grandfather, who had every reason to say “I don’t want to speak to the Germans,” always said this to me: “Bertrand, the Rhine River is not a border; it’s a passage. It’s one of the arteries of civilization. So even if we face difficulties, disputes, and struggles, we have to work together.”



The Summit on Media and Democracy in Europe was held at the historic Quai d’Orsay in Paris, France, on June 30, 2026.