



# Tea Timely News

by Ken Short



Tea is a product which may not, for some, be associated with the hilly plains of Southern Europe no matter how warm they may be. It may therefore come as a surprise to learn that some progress has been made to pilot a scheme for the economic development of the tea industry in the less than fertile plains of eastern Greece.

The Balkan Peninsula is wide and varied in its climatic temperament. In the northern and other mountainous districts there is a long winter with frequent storms and icy rain; but in the sea lapped regions of the south, winter lasts barely three months and March, and sometimes even February, may bring sunny, balmy weather reminiscent of a warm English summer day. Temperatures may rise to over 100 degrees in the plains but over the country generally the summer is rarely unduly hot.

The tea plant, moreover, is not particular about the soil although it grows best where there is plenty of loam and so the combination of climatic suitability and ease with which the crop is managed has persuaded the Greek government with EEC backing to sanction a pilot plantation on the Island of Andros in the Aegean Sea. In 2002, after much ministerial wrangling, a scheme, the brainchild of 37 year old Georgeos Pulvanos, a senior economist at the Greek Ministry of Agriculture in Athens, was launched and now occupies approximately 165 hectares of land near the centre of the island.

It has to be said that the economic advantages of a tea crop which is cultivable in Europe has not been

immediately obvious to the local population. Much cynicism and even hostility has been met by the small group of botanists who have carefully nurtured the young tea sprouts over a period of three years that it takes to establish the adult plant. In 2005 the first modest crop of Aegean tea was harvested and experts from India and China were brought in to establish a commercially viable blend from the, as then, limited variety of strains available. The good news is that it has been exported to Britain in small quantities and is being tested on the British public (worldwide known for their love of the honest cuppa). But the Greek distributors have, in their wisdom, decided that the best way for their statistical control to be effective is for the tea to be available only in bona fide hostelrys where people with no preconceived bias may make a truly objective comparison with the existing popular varieties. Fortunately, for the people of Kent, Aegean tea is now to be found in many of the more select establishments around the county and we may hope that as time passes it may become easily available to all.

I am advised that the tea is best taken without the traditional refinements of milk and sugar so you may find the mellow, fresh taste rather startling but very palatable as it naturally combines the smooth foretaste of spring with the almost bitter aftertaste of autumn with just a hint of lemon. So if you are feeling adventurous why not drop by your local hostelry and ask to try Aegean tea. We think that you will find the taste to be rather refreshing.