

# Greece steps up security

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Helena Smith in Athens

GREECE sent heavily armed commandos to the Albanian border yesterday in a last-ditch effort to stop an influx of bandits blamed for soaring crime and terror. The government also ordered the police and army to intensify patrols throughout the country.

Officials said security would be stepped up around Athens, where there has been a backlash of anti-Albanian sentiment.

The measures, which follow others earlier this year, were announced after the prime minister, Costas Simitis, held an urgent cabinet meeting to discuss the crisis. The public order minister, George Romeos, said that he had been taken aback by the scale of Albanian criminality in Greece.

"The measures we had

enforced before were simply not sufficient," he said. "We have to do our utmost now. People — Greek citizens — are scared."

In recent weeks there has been a flurry of kidnapping, mostly of Greek businessmen trading in Albania, by gangsters demanding large ransoms.

Last month Athens sent six frigates and extra security forces to keep the peace on Corfu, which lies opposite the rebel-held areas of southern Albania.

Since the Albanian insurrection, hundreds of Albanians have been caught smuggling arms and drugs into Greece. Most of the weapons, which include Kalashnikov rifles and hand grenades, are bound for other parts of Europe.

The gangsters, often described as "real-life Rambo", have been the cause of growing consternation in Greece's remote and moun-

tainous frontier areas. Several villages have been abandoned by people afraid of attack. Many fear that crime will increase when the Italian-led multinational force withdraws from Albania next month.

Yesterday a smuggler bringing home-grown hashish across the border threw a hand grenade at the police trying to arrest him. "It sounds surreal, but its absolutely real," said an officer.

"These people are really dangerous."

An estimated 350,000 Albanians, most illegal immigrants, work in Greece — more than in any other European Union member state.

The government, hoping to subdue the anti-Albanian feeling, announced this week that it would overturn previous legislation legitimising the migrants' status.