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Ankara warning shot on Cyprus

Helena Smith in Athens

ANKARA marked the 23rd anniversary of its invasion of northern Cyprus yesterday by sending its deputy prime minister to tell the island's breakaway republic that "partial integration" with Turkey was inevitable after the European Union's decision last week to offer Cyprus membership.

Bulent Ecevit said: "The Turkish republic of northern Cyprus will live forever as an independent state. But its foreign and defence policy will soon be handled by Turkey."

For years Ankara has said tensions would escalate if Cyprus, run by a Greek Cypriot government, joined the EU before a settlement had been reached. The Greek Cypriot government, unlike its Turkish counterpart, is internationally recognised.

Turkey is also smarting from the EU's decision last week to rebuff its own membership ambitions. Mr Ecevit, who as prime minister ordered the invasion of north Cyprus in 1974, is the leading hawk in the new Turkish government on issues involving the breakaway republic.

A climate of violently contrasting moods hung over the island yesterday as the two communities marked the anniversary.

While flags flew at halfmast in the south and tearful black-

clad Greek Cypriots staged protest rallies, in the south, Turkey celebrated with a military fanfare, dispatching six warships along with its top brass.

The show of force comes a year after four Greek Cypriots and a Turkish soldier were killed along the United Nations 112-mile-long ceasefire line dividing Cyprus.

The buffer zone has split the island's two communities since the invasion. Yesterday UN officials said both sides had stepped up security along the divide ahead of a month of demonstrations.

The anniversary coincides with what is widely seen as a serious attempt to reunite the island in a loose, bi-zonal federation. After talks in New York, the Greek Cypriot president, Glafcos Clerides, and the Turkish Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktash, agreed to continue the UN-sponsored negotiations in Geneva next month.

This weekend, President Clerides told his people at the weekend that he hoped the talks "will be the real commencement of an unprecedented effort . . . to find a solution which will close the wounds of the past".

But Mr Ecevit's threat of annexation could have raised the stakes. "The world must understand that Turkey is not bluffing," Mr Denktash said yesterday. "It proved in 1974 that it does not bluff."