

Greece Foils EU Move To Give Aid to Turkey

Clinton's Appeal Is Brushed Off by Athens

By Tom Buerkle
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CARDIFF, Wales — A British-led push to improve relations between the European Union and Turkey was blocked on Tuesday by Greece, which rejected proposals for fresh aid to soothe Ankara's anger at being left out of the EU's enlargement process.

Greece maintained its hard-line stance despite a direct appeal from President Bill Clinton, who took the unusual step of telephoning Prime Minister Costas Simitis in the early hours of Tuesday morning while the Greek leader was participating in the EU's semiannual summit meeting here.

Mr. Simitis said that Mr. Clinton had urged him to lift Greece's longstanding veto on EU aid to Turkey, saying it would ease tensions between Turkey — a NATO ally — and Europe.

But Mr. Simitis resisted the pressure, insisting that the blame for Turkey's soured relations with Europe rested squarely with Ankara.

That left EU leaders to repackage a position they adopted in December, which called for closer EU-Turkish relations and spoke of Turkey's eligibility for EU membership but left Turkey out of a group of 11 candidate countries from Eastern and Southern Europe.

That exclusion prompted Turkey to suspend political contacts with Europe in protest, and Washington has been working alongside major European countries in an effort to repair the diplomatic damage.

The EU has promised to provide Turkey with 75 million European currency units of aid a year under a 1995 agreement on closer trade and political ties, but Greece has consistently blocked payment of the funds because of disputes with Ankara in the Aegean Sea.

Athens has insisted that the disputes be submitted to international arbitration before lifting its veto on EU aid.

EU leaders also engaged in a preliminary skirmish over the bloc's internal budget here, but the talks did little more than demonstrate the wide gap between the EU's paymasters, led by Germany, and its budgetary beneficiaries.

Adopting a tough stance in what could be his last meeting with fellow EU leaders, Chancellor Helmut Kohl demanded a reduction in Germany's big payments to the EU budget. Germany pays about 11 billion Ecus more than it gets back in farm and development subsidies, by far

the largest net contribution of any country. That makes the budget an obvious target for Mr. Kohl as he seeks to come from behind in the campaign before German election in September.

Mr. Kohl recalled the rebate that Margaret Thatcher won for Britain in the 1980s and insisted that the EU adopt what he called a fairer method of billing its members. While Mr. Kohl won predictable support from the Netherlands, Sweden and Austria, other big net payers into the EU budget, he got a stiff rebuff from President Jacques Chirac of France, which draws some of the biggest benefits from the EU farm budget.

"I'm not in favor of a reduction of the German contribution because it would mean the French contribution would be increased," Mr. Chirac said bluntly.

Disputes over the budget threaten to delay the enlargement process, and the president of the European Parliament offered the gloomiest official prediction here Monday when he said the first Eastern members would not join the EU before 2005.

Officials said that the real bargaining over the budget would not begin until a special summit meeting in October, after the German election, and that the bloc would be hard-pressed to finish negotiations by a March 1999 deadline.