

EUROPE

Greece Trying to Alter Image as the 'Spoiled' Odd Man Out of Europe

By Jonathan C. Randal
Washington Post Service

ATHENS — In a major shift, Greece has traded in its long-standing odd-man-out role in NATO and European Union affairs for more pragmatic and responsible policies toward its neighbors.

Shedding the confrontational tactics of the early 1990s, Prime Minister Costas Simitis seems determined to rely on regional cooperation, budgetary rigor and improving economic growth to define a calmer turn-of-the-century role for the nation's 10 million citizens.

The change reflects painful lessons learned since the end of the Cold War and the perceived threat of the growing unpredictability of Turkey, its more powerful neighbor to the east, according to officials, diplomats and academics.

This pragmatic approach may consign to the history books the emotional

roller-coaster politics of Mr. Simitis's fellow Socialist predecessor, Andreas Papandreou, who dominated Greek political life for two decades until his death last June.

In his heyday in the 1980s, Mr. Papandreou stirred Greek hearts, especially by healing the wounds of

NEWS ANALYSIS

Greece's 1944-48 civil war and finally recognizing the losing Communists as equal citizens. In the Cold War's final decade, he put the nation on the international map by threatening to close U.S. military bases here and otherwise antagonizing Washington.

Mr. Papandreou first opposed Greek membership in the European Union, and then milked it to the last subsidized drop. So over the years, Greece's 14 EU partners became increasingly annoyed

with what a senior official here described as "our spoiled-child" approach of seldom playing by the rules even when receiving aid worth \$5 billion a year.

Mr. Simitis has proved his political mettle by calling and winning early parliamentary elections in September. During the winter, he faced down striking, normally pro-Socialist farmers and teachers opposed to austerity measures designed to bring the economy's performance closer to EU guidelines.

Senior officials contend that the new policy proves Greece's emerging political maturity after decades of turbulence. With three more years of Mr. Simitis's stewardship likely before elections, the Athens stock market seems to agree. It doubled in value in the four months after his refusal to knuckle under to the strikers.

Western diplomats voice prudence,

but credit Athens's new pragmatism with paying diplomatic and political dividends unthinkable barely 18 months ago.

These are among the examples that illustrate Mr. Simitis's pragmatic insistence on cutting losses:

- Greece is enjoying thriving trade relations — and even participated in joint military exercises — with the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia, whose legitimacy Athens had long worked to deny.

- In Albania, where relations were inflamed less than two years ago because five ethnic Greeks were jailed on espionage charges, a sizable Greek Army peacekeeping contingent is deployed as part of the Italian-led European multinational force.

- Foreign Minister Theodoros Pangalos recently astounded many Greeks by openly dissociating Athens from a virtual German veto on Ankara's EU

membership application and insisting that "Turkey's final goal must be unification with Europe."

Coming only 14 months after Greece and Turkey almost went to war over two tiny uninhabited islets in the Aegean Sea in January 1996, Mr. Pangalos's remarks encouraged cautious hopes that the abiding tensions between these NATO members could be reduced.

Turkey reciprocated within weeks. For the first time in a decade, its army chief of staff attended Greek national day festivities in Ankara and urged an end to traditional animosities.

Still, Western efforts to capitalize on such gestures proceed prudently. The Dutch government recently promoted consultations between retired Greek and Turkish notables to discuss grievances.

But nationalistic opposition from 32 Socialist legislators apparently prompted the Simitis government to refuse a

meeting next month between the experts, deciding instead to exchange written texts.

Such suspicions are scarcely new. But a senior official hinted that Mr. Pangalos's remarks reflected a subtle change in traditional Greek evaluations of Turkey and a need to engage Ankara, rather than spurn it.

"We Greeks must get over the old knee-jerk reaction that if something is bad for Turkey, it is good for us," the official said. "We must not pour oil on the fire."

The official had to foresee further troubles with Turkey, but at least he felt that Greece's position was now better understood by its NATO and EU partners.

"Europe has taught us Athens is not the center of the world," he added. "that we're all in the same boat and need to cooperate with our partners — and not just on economic questions."

Cyprus Holds 54 in Rioting That Protested Peace Concert

Compiled by Our Staff From Dispatches

NICOSIA — Several dozen Greek-Cypriots suspected of having taken part in violent protests here against a peace concert featuring Greek and Turkish-Cypriot singers appeared in court on Tuesday.

The 54 suspects were brought for arraignment to a heavily guarded courtroom in the divided capital of this Mediterranean island.

They were arrested during protests late Monday against the concert by a Turkish pop singer, Burak Kut, and a Greek star, Sakis Rouvas, which was held in the no-man's land dividing the city. The buffer zone is patrolled by UN troops.

The concert was the first major gathering of Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities since clashes between the two groups erupted in 1963.

The police fired tear gas to disperse Greek-Cypriot protesters who set fire to piles of garbage, threw stones and broke shop windows during some four hours of rioting.

About 40 people were treated for minor injuries and released.

The concert itself passed off peacefully, and the city was quiet Tuesday.

Several thousand Greek-Cypriots denounced the concert as an attempt to distract the world from the Turkish Army's occupation of northern Cyprus.

But Gustave Feissel, the United Nations representative in Cyprus, hailed the concert as a success despite the violence.

"Not only did everybody have a wonderful time but they sent a message across the island which hopefully will show people the way forward," he said.

Turkey invaded northern Cyprus in 1974 after a right-wing coup in Nicosia aimed at uniting the island with Greece.

(AFP, Reuters)

■ Fugitive in Istanbul

Asil Nadir, the former chairman of the Polly Peck conglomerate who is wanted for theft in Britain, reportedly arrived in Istanbul on Tuesday after he spent four years in the Turkish part of Cyprus. The Associated Press reported.

Interpol has issued an arrest warrant for Mr. Nadir, but a Turkish police official ruled out his extradition to Britain.

"Whatever his crime is, the extradition of a Turkish citizen is out of the question," the official, Ihsan Yilmazturk, told the official Anatolia news agency.

Mr. Nadir ran Polly Peck, a food and electronics conglomerate that boomed in the 1980s until it collapsed in 1991 with debts of \$2.1 billion after investigators began probing irregularities in Mr. Nadir's finances.

He faces 13 charges of theft from his companies in Britain involving £30 million (\$47 million).

A British Embassy spokesman said Ambassador David Logan mentioned the arrest warrant for Mr. Nadir during a meeting at the Turkish Foreign Ministry on Tuesday. The spokesman refused to give further details.

Mr. Nadir checked into the Bosphorus Pasha Hotel in the affluent Beylerbeyi district on the Asian side of the city. Atakan Gurses, a receptionist for the hotel, acknowledged.

Mr. Nadir said recently that he would return to Turkey to take over his investments in electronics and media.