1ut. Her. Trii p 6.

2.4.98 .

The Cyprus Mess

The bids by Cyprus and Turkey to join the European Union were once thought to provide incentives for an easing of tensions between Greece and Turkey and between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, too. A general settling down of an agitated corner of Europe seemed the potential diplomatic prize. But that was before the European Union fumbled the opportunity away. Now there is fresh talk of war, and it's American diplomacy to the rescue, again.

It was awkward enough when the European Union took in Greece but not its strategically more powerfully but economically and politically less ready rival, Turkey. That invited Greece to play the gatekeeper. Germany, inspired in part by its domestic argument over Turkish guest workers, took up a similar role. As a result, the Turks were insultingly denied a place in the queue of would-be EU new members. Others, including Cyprus and the new Central European democracies, went right into the line. The Turks countered excessively by suspending talks between the Greek government of divided Cyprus and the enclave that Ankara controls in the north, by threats to annex the enclave, and by military gestures. Greek Cypriots imprudently ordered anti-aircraft missiles from Russia.

A year ago it was possible to wonder why the United States should get into this particular European mess. The answer — the right answer — was and is that the American leadership role in NATO makes Washington the rescuer of last resort when two alliance members depart reason.

The Europeans, however, should not be let off the hook. Greece and Turkey are not Middle East, they are Europe, Western Europe. This is not 1945, it is 1998. Europeans should have been able to compose a single political intelligence to deal with the Greek-Turkish question. At the least, the European Union could have handled its accession affairs in a manner that, if it did not ease national grievances, would not have aggravated them. Now the United States is left to help, if it can, bring Greeks and Turks back to the starting line.

— THE WASHINGTON POST.