

Athens Gets Assurance From Yeltsin On Missiles

Weapons for Cyprus Raise Prospect of More Russian Arms Sales

Reuters

MOSCOW — President Boris Yeltsin, eyeing future arms sales to Greece, reassured Athens on Tuesday that Moscow would not back down over a controversial deal to deliver missiles to Cyprus.

The Russian president met Defense Minister Apostolos-Athanasios Tsouhatzopoulos of Greece in a departure from protocol described by the Kremlin as underlining the "special prospects for Russian-Greek military and technical cooperation," the Interfax press agency said.

Interfax quoted Sergei Yastrzhembsky, a Kremlin spokesman, as saying Mr. Yeltsin had assured Mr. Tsouhatzopoulos of "Moscow's determination to fulfill the contract to provide Cyprus with the S-300 anti-missile defense system on time."

Turkey said last week that the deployment of the surface-to-air missiles on the divided island, expected in September or October, could lead to fighting.

Turkey has about 30,000 troops on Cyprus, which has been split since Turkish forces invaded the north of the island in 1974 after a brief Greek-Cypriot coup engineered by Greece. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is recognized only by Ankara.

The Greek-Cypriot government, which is recognized internationally, has about 10,000 guards on the island.

Tensions flared Jan. 4 when the Greek-Cypriot government announced that it had signed a deal with Russia to buy long-range ground-to-air missiles.

Since then, Turkey has threatened military action against the Greek-ruled part of Cyprus to stop it from deploying the missiles. Turkey also has threatened to set up air and naval bases in the northern part of Cyprus that it occupies, if Greece continues to set up military bases in the southern part of the island.

Mr. Tsouhatzopoulos, meanwhile, thanked Moscow for backing the Greek-Cypriot government during his meeting with Mr. Yeltsin, which focused on geopolitics, in particular the crises in Serbia's Kosovo Province and Iraq. Interfax quoted Mr. Yastrzhembsky as saying.

The Itar-Tass press agency had said

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