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Simitis urges an end to Greek-U.S. flap

Premier moves to stop war of words with Washington; government spokesman says the issue is closed

Premier Costas Simitis moved yesterday to lower the tension between Athens and Washington, following his foreign minister's recent attacks on resident Bill Clinton and U.S. policy. At a meeting with Foreign Minister Theodoros Pangalos and Defense Minister Akis Tsochadzopoulos, Simitis stressed that the war of words with the United States would have to stop and that contacts with the American side would be furthered. Following the meeting, Pangalos said that "relations with the United States have always been good." Then he announced that "we will have positive developments in the next few days." He did not elaborate on this, and the only information avail-

able last night was that Pangalos would meet with U.S. ambassador Nicholas Burns in the next few days. However, all sources yesterday insisted that "the Pangalos issue is closed." Tsochadzopoulos said that "the messages have been sent."

Pangalos last week accused Clinton of telling a "shameless lie" when he promised to help solve the Cyprus issue. He then suggested that Greek Americans might stop supporting U.S. presidential candidates and make their contributions to an armaments fund for Greece instead. Andrew Athens, chairman of the Council of Greeks Abroad (SAE), yesterday expressed his discomfort at the suggestion. He told reporters

in Athens that he was very upset by the developments and also that Greek Americans could not stop supporting American politicians. State Department spokesman James Rubin, late on Monday, also criticized Pangalos for the comments. "They are so outrageous and so unbecoming of the foreign minister of a NATO ally that we would be surprised if anyone took them seriously," Rubin said. "Americans don't need any outside advice on how to participate in the workings of our democracy." The depth of U.S.-Greek friendship made it "hard for the comments of one individual to harm that relationship," he said.

Greece's government spokesman tried to mend fences earlier yesterday.

"Greek-American relations are good. They can and must become better," Dimitris Reppas said. "Both sides must work towards this with specific acts. An inconvenience was caused on both sides. We believe that this inconvenience is a small parenthesis that has already closed." Asked whether this was so, Pangalos commented last night: "If the government spokesman says so, then it is." According to our sources, Simitis told his ministers that Greece had to strengthen its position internationally. He said that Greece had to be on the alert because Turkey had entered a long pre-election period which could encourage its extremist elements. Other issues discussed were Greek-

Turkish relations and the Cyprus issue. Regarding Cyprus's purchase of a Russian S-300 air defense system (which is opposed by the United States and other allies of Greece, and which Turkey has threatened to attack), our sources said that a final decision will be left to Cypriot President Glafcos Clerides and that this will be subject to gaining something in return.

At a separate meeting at the defense ministry, Greece rejected a proposal by NATO for an Air Command and Control System (ACCS) to function as a confidence-building measure in the Aegean. The system would mean that Turkish warplanes would not have to file flight plans with Athens in the Aegean.