

F.T.

12. 12. 2000

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# Yugoslav leader snubs Greece

By Kerin Hope in Athens

Vojislav Kostunica, Yugoslav president, annoyed Greek officials unexpectedly calling off his visit to Athens due to a storm tomorrow. One official said it was the second time Kostunica had postponed his trip claiming pressure of work in Belgrade.

The delay is being seen as a setback to Greece's attempt to tighten relations with Yugoslavia after the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic. The government, led by Prime Minister Costas Simitis, the president, has given Mr Kostunica political and economic backing under a policy, backed by the EU and the US, of deepening Greek involvement in the Balkans.

Last month Greece's foreign ministry made elaborate arrangements for Yugoslav president Kostunica to visit Mount Athos in northern Greece where Kostunica attended a night prayer vigil at the Hiliandarion monastery, a Serbian orthodox foundation. It was billed as a private visit but received extensive coverage in both Athens and Belgrade. With Serbia expected to hold a parliamentary election later this month, Kostunica's devoutness made a sharp contrast with Mr Milosevic who usually visits Greece for holiday during the Yugoslav wars.

The Greek government has also made efforts to help Serbia get through the winter, offering \$15m in aid to cover fuel imports and postponing payment due for electricity imports from Greece.

But Mr Simitis's efforts to show even-handedness in his relations with all his Balkan neighbours appears to have aroused concern in Belgrade.

Albanian political leader Ibrahim Rugova, Maceo Gjukanovic of Montenegro and Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus itself met recently in Athens under the auspices of a private US group promoting better inter-ethnic relations.