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EU Court, in a First, Fines Greece for Pollution

The Associated Press

BRUSSELS — The European Court of Justice imposed a fine on Greece Tuesday of €20,000 a day for failure to respect European Union environmental laws.

The ruling is a legal landmark, representing the first time that the EU's highest court has fined a member government.

Greece will have to pay the daily sum, equivalent to \$19,000, into EU coffers until it complies with an earlier court ruling demanding the cleanup of a waste dump on the island of Crete.

In a statement, the Luxembourg-based court said the fine reflected the "particularly serious" nature of the case

and the long duration of Greece's infringement of EU law.

The court first ordered Greece to close the dump, near the town of Chania, in 1992 after the European Commission claimed the disposal of toxic waste there presented a danger to the environment and human health.

However, Greece has ignored successive demands for a cleanup of the site, claiming its efforts to build a modern waste disposal facility near Chania have faced stiff opposition from local residents.

In Athens, a spokesman, Dimitris Reppas, said the government had issued a legal decree June 14 to force the issue and would go ahead with plans for the

alternative site despite local protests.

"Greece is required to pay a specific sum of money," Mr. Reppas said. "We have issued legislation that is in effect. It is something unfortunate, but it is something we are obliged to do while we work feverishly to create this new area."

He added the government would remove the amount of the fine from funds given to Chania for other projects.

The court was granted powers to impose fines on a national government by the 1992 Maastricht Treaty.

Other cases are pending, one against France over night-work regulations and another, against Greece, over non-recognition of diplomas issued in EU partner nations.