

# Greece blocks EU accord with Nato

By Judy Dempsey, Diplomatic Correspondent, in Brussels

Greece yesterday blocked an agreement forged last week between diplomats and Turkey that gave the European Union access to Nato's assets once a 60,000-strong European rapid reaction force is established in 2003.

The unexpected deal, negotiated by UK, US and Dutch diplomats with Turkey, ended a two-year dispute that threatened to create a European Security and Defence policy (ESDP) separate from Nato in a way that would lead to costly duplication in certain military equipment.

EU foreign ministers had yesterday hoped to seal the accord ahead of the EU summit at the end of this week in Laeken. That would have entailed the EU and Nato exchanging letters setting out the extent of their co-operation.

It would also have spelled out how the Europeans would have assured access to Nato planning, a critical element if the rapid reaction force was to carry out any missions independent of Nato.

George Papandreou, Greece's foreign minister, said his government had problems with the EU's letter to Nato since it failed to address Greece's own security concerns once ESDP was up and running.

Diplomats said Greece wanted assurances from the EU that once the rapid reaction force was in place, it would not be used in any way that would damage



George Papandreou, Greek foreign minister (centre) in conversation with his counterparts Jack Straw of the UK (left) and Jozias Van Aartsen of the Netherlands (right) AP

Greece's security interests. This was an implicit reference to Cyprus and the Aegean, two areas in dispute between Greece and Turkey.

An ESDP operation requires unanimity of member states before any mission is decided.

Athens also wanted watertight guarantees that the deal with Turkey would not undermine the EU's autonomy. Indeed, Turkey, a leading Nato member, had threatened to use its right of veto to block the Europeans' access to Nato assets. It

dropped its objections after the military council received assurances that ESDP would not be used against their national security interests.

Diplomats said Greece was holding out more for political reasons. "Greek officials have to sell this deal to their

own public opinion. That means showing they are fighting for their interests even though in principle the government accepts the accord," said one.

■ EU foreign ministers named Austrian Erhard Busek as head of the Stabi-

lity Pact, which helps with the reconstruction of south-east Europe. Mr Busek, a former Austrian vice-chancellor and expert on the Balkan region, replaces Bodo Hombach, former aide to Germany's Chancellor Gerhard Schröder.